



The Soviet Conduct of Tactical Maneuver

**Spearhead of the
Offensive**

David M. Glantz

ROUTLEDGE SERIES ON SOVIET MILITARY THEORY AND PRACTICE

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

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SPEARHEAD OF THE OFFENSIVE

DAVID M. GLANTZ

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In modern, combined arms combat, forward detachments are an important element of the combat formation in the offense and defense. Their use ensures the high tempo and continuousness of the offense and the stability and activeness of the defense, and they increase the depth of the defense.

Having a strong composition and various reinforcements, forward detachments can successfully accomplish their combat missions in any type of combat, with the use of any method of combat operations by the enemy. The most combat effective subunits, the personnel of which will undergo specialized training, will be assigned for operations in the forward detachment.

The employment of nuclear weapons and new means of destruction in combined arms combat does not reduce, but, on the contrary, expands the opportunities for use of forward detachments and makes their combat missions more varied.

F.D. SVERDLOV,
Peredovye otriady v boiu
[Forward detachments in combat],
1986

CONTENTS

Figures	ix
Preface	xiii
Introduction	xvii
1. Definitions	1
2. Combat Missions and Functions	10
3. Offensive Use	14
4. The Meeting Engagement	53
5. Defensive Use	61
6. Evolution of the Forward Detachment Through 1945	74
Genesis	74
Toward Deep Battle: The 1920s	77
Toward Deep Operations: 1929–1936	80
Turbulence and Reassessment: 1937–1941	88
The Test of War	95
7. The Post-War Years: 1946–1985	194
The Aftermath of War: 1946–1960	194
The Revolution in Military Affairs: 1961–1970	203
The Counter-Revolution in Military Affairs: 1971–1985	213
8. Conclusions	227
Notes	240
Index	257

FIGURES

1. Principal elements of a march formation	5
2. March formation in anticipation of a meeting engagement	6
3. Combat formation (variant)	7
4. Attack from the march	21
5. Deployment from pre-combat formation into combat formation	22
6. Forward detachments in combat formation (variants)	24
7. Forward detachment in the penetration	29
8. Methods of pursuit of the enemy	34
9. Forward detachment operations in the enemy tactical defense zone	36
10. Forward detachment commander's plan to secure a river crossing	39
11. Air assault to secure a river crossing	46
12. Air assault to secure a mountain pass	47
13. Forward detachment operations to secure a mountain pass	49
14. Forward detachment operations in a meeting engagement (variant)	57
15. Forward detachment operations in a meeting engagement (variant)	59
16. Forward detachment in the defense	63
17. Army operational formation, 1936	86
18. Army operational formation, 1941	94
19. 12th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 23 June 1941	99
20. German intelligence view, 24 June 1941	100
21. 15th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 23 June 1941	101
22. German situation map, 24 June 1941	102-3
23. 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps counterattacks, 26 June 1941	105
24. German intelligence view, 26 June 1941	106-7

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

25. 8th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 27 June 1941	109
26. German situation map, 27 June 1941	110–11
27. 5th Airborne Corps at Medyn, December 1941	114
28. Soviet defenses on the distant approaches to Stalingrad, July 1942	118
29. March formation of 1st Tank Corps, November 1942	124
30. 4th Guards Tank Corps advance to Krasnoarmeiskaia, 11 February 1943	127
31. March formation of 17th (4th Guards) Tank Corps, 16 December 1942	130
32. <i>Front</i> and army operational formation, Summer 1943	132
33. Belgorod–Khar’kov operation: Situation, 0500 3 August 1943	136
34. Belgorod–Khar’kov operation: Situation, 2200 3 August 1943	137
35. Belgorod–Khar’kov operation: Situation, 11–12 August 1943	139
36. German situation map, 11–12 August 1943	140
37. 3d Guards Tank Army’s dash to the Dnepr River, 20–21 September 1943	142
38. German intelligence map, 21 September 1943	144–5
39. Kiev operation: Situation, 1900 12 November 1943	149
40. Kiev operation: German situation map, 2200 13 November 1943	150
41. Zhitomir–Berdichev operation: German situation map, 29 December 1943	155
42. Zhitomir–Berdichev operation: German situation map, 10 January 1944	156
43. Zhitomir–Berdichev operation: German situation map, 11 January 1944	158
44. 4th Guards Tank Corps operations: 29–31 December 1943	160
45. Zhitomir–Berdichev operation: German situation map, 31 December 1943	162
46. Korsun–Shevchenkovskii operation: Situation, 24 January 1944	164
47. Korsun–Shevchenkovskii operation: Situation, 28 January 1944	166
48. Korsun–Shevchenkovskii operation: German	

FIGURES

situation map, 28 January 1944	167
49. Belorussian operation: 1st Guards Tank Corps' advance on Slonim, July 1944	169
50. L'vov–Sandomierz operation: 1st Guards Tank Army deception plan	171
51. Lublin–Brest operation: 91st Rifle Corps' crossing of the Vistula River, 27 July 1944	174
52. Lublin–Brest operation: Situation, 3 August 1944	175
53. Iassy–Kishinev operation: 37th Army's offensive plan	177
54. Vistula–Oder operation: Situation, 14 January 1945	183
55. Vistula–Oder operation: Situation, 19 January 1945	184
56. Vistula–Oder operation: Situation, 24 January 1945	186
57. Vistula–Oder operation: Situation, 30–31 January 1945	187
58. Manchurian operation: 6th Guards Tank Army march formation	189
59. Manchurian operation: 36th Army forward detachment	190
60. Manchurian operation: Forward detachments employed	191
61. Front operational formation, 1946–53	195
62. Army operational formation, 1946–53	197
63. Front operational formation, 1958–62	200
64. Army operational formation, 1958–62	201
65. Front operational formation, 1968	204
66. Army operational formation, 1968	205
67. Front operational formation: Against an unprepared defense, 1987	233
68. Army operational formation: Against an unprepared defense, 1987	234
69. Front operational formation: Against a partially prepared defense, 1987	235
70. Army operational formation: Against a partially prepared defense, 1987	236
71. Front operational formation: Against a fully prepared defense, 1987	237
72. Army operational formation: Against a fully prepared defense, 1987	238

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 73. Operational and tactical maneuver forces during
the exploitation | 239 |
|---|-----|

PREFACE

The Soviets have long understood the prerequisites for achieving combat success at the operational and tactical levels of war. Among those prerequisites is the necessity of conducting efficient, rapid maneuver. Long-term Soviet concern for the utility of operational maneuver is well-documented in Soviet military works and, to an increasing degree, in Western analyses of Soviet operational techniques as well. Western appreciation of Soviet concerns for tactical maneuver is less mature. Most objective Western analyses portray Soviet tactical measures collectively as steamroller tactics, characterized by Soviet use of overwhelming, deeply echeloned concentrations of forces committed to combat in conjunction with massive fire support. Once this massive force has done its damage to enemy tactical defenses, then, and only then, do Soviet operational maneuver forces go into action, using maneuver to project forces deep into their enemy's rear.

This Dr. Jekyll—Mr Hyde characterization of Soviet offensive techniques postulates early reliance on massive forces attacking in basically linear fashion followed by wholesale reliance on artful, flexible operational maneuver. While centralized control, lack of flexibility, and a commensurate de-emphasis of initiative characterize the early (penetration) phase, just the reverse applies to subsequent (exploitation) phases. Understandably most Westerners question whether the Soviet Army can adjust to meet the requirements of the exploitation phase.

A close reading of contemporary Soviet military theorists and an examination of Soviet military practices (past and present) contradicts that stereotypical view. In fact, the Soviets stress the utility of maneuver during all phases of offensive action and have, in fact, seriously considered the necessity for maneuver from the very onset of operations when they ponder the circumstances pertaining to how and when they would attack. Hence, until very recently the Soviets have emphasized the utility of an offensive after only limited preparations.

This book examines Soviet views on tactical maneuver within the important operational context. It proceeds from the assumption that the Soviets cannot successfully employ operational maneuver until they master techniques for the conduct of tactical maneuver. For just as

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

operational success directly depends on the achievement of tactical success, so also does operational maneuver depend for success on skillful conduct of tactical maneuver. One simply cannot exist without the other.

Since maneuver at the tactical level is often obscured by an inability to identify and distinguish between specific entities in the tactical combat formation of Soviet units, the first section of this book examines the functions of units which participate in tactical combat across a wide spectrum of combat conditions. My intent is to distinguish between these often confusing force entities. I then turn to the most important functional entity tasked with performing the critical combat function of tactical maneuver, the forward detachment [*peredovoi otriad*].

A number of recent Soviet works have focused on the role and function of forward detachments, including Col. F. D. Sverdlov's *Peredovye otriady v boiu* [Forward detachments in battle]. These works only briefly address the evolution of forward detachments and then focus on their contemporary use in the manner of a Soviet field regulation.

The second section echoes Sverdlov's book and spells out in some detail current Soviet theoretical views as to how these units will be used in combat. This description, being only theoretical, approaches forward detachment operations on the basis of what should be done. Hence, like Sverdlov's view, it is positive and captures the comprehensive range of forward detachment missions, but does not reflect problems these units are likely to encounter.

The third section of this book recounts when and why the Soviets developed the forward detachments and how those detachments have evolved to meet changing circumstances of war. It synthesizes theory and experience by relating the concrete combat experiences of former Soviet forward detachments operating in a wide variety of circumstances. These experiences, positive as well as negative, provide a more realistic view of what forward detachments can hope to accomplish on contemporary and future battlefields. A concluding fifth section summarizes contemporary and future use of forward detachments and catalogues likely problems and possible solutions. The conclusions also assess where the Soviets are regarding use of forward detachments and, more important, where they may go in the future as new high-technology conventional weaponry makes its presence felt on the battlefield.

Source material for this study is varied in nature. I have relied for my view of Soviet tactical techniques on a wide range of detailed Soviet

PREFACE

sources. Although these sources are comprehensive, they are also unduly positive regarding what forward detachments have achieved in the past and will achieve in the future. To provide balance, I have used a broad range of German military archival records to assess the veracity of Soviet accounts, particularly in the realm of unsuccessful forward detachment operations. To a lesser degree, the same applies to Japanese sources.

In addition, I have used a wide variety of hitherto classified sources to substantiate Soviet claims regarding the development of forward detachment theory and forces during the pre-Second World War period and during the post-war years.

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INTRODUCTION

A wide variety of internal and external political, economic, and social factors have coalesced to produce striking change in the Soviet Union and its former satellites. Although no one can predict with any degree of certainty what these changes will ultimately produce, they must be considered as the context for future Soviet military policy, doctrine, strategy, operational art and tactics.

Within the Soviet Union economic stagnation has reached the crisis point. The decay of the Soviet economy and ineffective attempts to deal with it have reduced the economy's productivity and, more important in a military sense, denied it the prospect of mastering the rapid technological changes which are sweeping the developed world. Economic crisis has, in turn, fostered political and social turmoil which threatens the fabric of Soviet political life and society. Democratization, unleashed in a conscious attempt to legitimize official programs for economic reform, has concurrently released new political forces, which can alter the rigid political structure of the Soviet state, and nationalism, which simultaneously generates both centripetal forces within the Russian nation and centrifugal forces on the part of the Soviet Union's national republics. Democratization has also severely undermined the power and authority of its natural targets, the Communist party and the *nomenklatura*.¹

These economic and political crises have, in turn, underscored vividly the class and ethnic nature of the Soviet state, have exacerbated class and ethnic distinctions, and have fostered virtual low-level social warfare among classes and nationalities. This is a particularly vexing problem in light of the impending minority of Great Russians within their Soviet state.

All of these forces, singly or in combination, will affect both the nature of the Soviet state and the shape and form of its military establishment in the future, as the Soviet state strives to achieve a consensus regarding its position in and relation to Europe and the rest of the world.

While internal factors will condition the Soviet Union's reaction to the world, in a political and military sense, the main future variable is the structure of the international arena itself. There, major changes

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

have occurred and are occurring that the Soviets must take into account as they formulate their policies and strategies. The Soviet perspective is now recognizing the following factors:

- the arms race of the 1980s which, while creating enormous economic pressures on both sides, failed to accord military advantage to the Soviets (and, in fact, may have accorded advantage to the West);
- the changing international political balance, characterized, in part, by the increased political and economic power of Europe (EEC) and Japan, the opening of China to limited Western influence, the unleashing of politically potent religious forces in the Middle East and potentially in southern Asia, and the continued pauperization and political weakness of friendly Third World governments;
- the new technological revolution, principally in cybernetics, which, because of an inability to compete, places the Soviet Union in increasing disadvantage;
- the revival of nationalism world-wide and its negative effects on the status quo;
- the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and, with it, diminished Soviet influence in Europe (in a Cold War sense);
- the unification of Germany;
- the limited success of Soviet-sponsored or supported wars of national liberation and the ensuing political and economic enfeebling of Soviet client states world-wide.

All of these complex internal and external factors have impelled change within the Soviet Union, and these changes have evolved in a dialectical sense with one generating another. Gorbachev's initial economic program of *uskorenie*, which was designed to speed up economic activity, failed and instead underscored the need for openness and debate of vital issues. The policy of *perestroika* followed, a revitalization program of both the economy and the military, which, like a germ developing in a petri dish, had to be accompanied by a program of *glasnost* to lend it credence and vitality. When it became clear that institutional constraints threatened to throttle *perestroika*, the ensuing program of democratization [*demokratizatsiia*] sought to break the institutional log-jam and legitimize reform.

Each of these stages has reinforced the dialectical truth that all trends are interrelated, and one cannot have genuine progress in one realm without commensurate progress in other important realms. This truth propelled Gorbachev in the spring of 1990 to embrace reform on all

INTRODUCTION

fronts, with inherent risks, while attempting to control the entire process through the new institution of President of the Soviet Union. The military corollary of these fundamental internal and external political, economic, and social changes has been a revision of Soviet military policy and declared Soviet intent to implement a defensive military doctrine. That, in turn, requires articulation of a new military strategy and new concepts for waging warfare at the operational and tactical levels.

As they ponder their future military strategy, the Soviets must contend with the nature of future war. The General Staff, the institution traditionally entrusted with this task, has always experienced difficulty projecting thirty years into the future. The difficulty, however, has not been with developing an accurate image of future war, for, in fact, as the experiences of the 1920s and 1930s have indicated, Soviet theoretical concepts were quite visionary. Instead, the General Staff has found it difficult to translate that vision into reality. It readily imagined the technology and force structures required to exploit its vision, but could not develop them quickly enough. Today that traditional dilemma is even more serious, for, in fact, the General Staff is having difficulty engaging in the traditional process of foresight and forecasting with any degree of surety. Compounding that dilemma are the increasing problems Soviet industry is experiencing in developing and fielding new technology. It is the technical realm of future war that confounds and frustrates Soviet military theorists, for they know the nation they serve is increasingly unable to respond to their needs.

Today the Soviets face two dichotomies resulting from their attempts to analyze future war: the first dealing with who is doing the analysis and the second with the results of the analysis themselves. The General Staff and its supporting research organizations, the traditional source of truth on future war, have been challenged by the political and social scientists and economists of civilian academic institutes, whose *instituti*-*niki* now also study the subject of war (based on the judgement that war and its consequences are too great to be left to military men). General Staff analysis embodies continuity in Soviet military thought and its views on future war are evolutionary and thoroughly consistent with those that they embraced in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It recognizes the significant impact of technological changes in warfare, but generally rejects the idea that future war is now inconceivable.²

The General Staff has argued that, although the risk of global war tends to deter political-military action in peacetime, fundamentally new weaponry is creating completely new forms of combat. The six key elements of Soviet General Staff assessments are:

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

- (1) the initial period of war
- (2) the likely intensity and scale of combat
- (3) the means (weaponry) to be employed
- (4) the consequences for the USSR economy and population
- (5) the duration of war
- (6) the influence of U.S. and NATO doctrine on “reasonable sufficiency.”³

In its view, Soviet ground forces’ “defensive” operations would not be defensive to the end of a war; rather they would act “decisively” if the enemy did not cease operations immediately. This seems to be consistent with initial Soviet descriptions of its new defensive doctrine, but the “character of modern war,” which it then describes, suggests a picture of warfare rather different from that postulated by the proponents of defensivism (the *institutniki*). The General Staff view postulates:

- extremely high intensity operations, that would be dynamic and take place at a high tempo;
- broad global extent, including operations in space;
- extremely destructive combat: more so than ever before;
- high expenditure of resources, particularly to seize and maintain the initiative;
- *ochagovyi* [fragmented] combat. Disappearance of the “front line” or “first echelon,” so that traditional terms like Forward Edge of the Battle Area (FEBA), Forward Line of Own Troops (FLOT) or of enemy troops (FLET) are no longer meaningful. Rather, “zones of combat” up to 100 kilometers wide and deep would be created;
- no country or area would be safe from enemy action, as no “deep rear” [*glubokiy tyl*] would exist;
- strategic goals would be achieved through combined arms operations; no particular weapons systems could be singled out as having overwhelming significance;
- the destruction of nuclear and chemical plants during the course of a war, whether nuclear or conventional, would be a disaster. The shadow of Chernobyl’ is clearly dominant here;
- nuclear war could liquidate the world’s population.⁴

On the other hand, the *institutniki* argue the folly of war as André Kokoshin argued in November 1988:

Nowadays, at a time when the idea is taking root that war can no longer serve as a rational means of politics (at least not in Soviet–

INTRODUCTION

American relations, between the WTO and NATO), the need for the highest state and political leadership to know the fundamentals of military strategy, operational plans, the functioning of the military mechanisms of carrying out decisions and so on, has by no means been eliminated. On the contrary, it is increasing. This is because decisions made at the boundary between politics and strategy may have fatal and irreversible consequences.⁵

In a major article published in December 1988, General G.I. Salmanov presented a classic view of modern war in the language of the General Staff:

What, then, is new in the make-up of Soviet military doctrine, and how is it reflected in the nature of modern war?

In the first place – it is the reinforcement, and accentuation of its defensive orientation ...

Defense in the initial period of a war is now regarded, not only as a means of bleeding the enemy with comparatively fewer forces, as a means of stopping him as quickly as possible and creating the necessary conditions for active counter-offensive action, but also as a means, and this is most important, of making the enemy think over and over again (*mnogo raz podumat'*) before he decides to attack in the first place. In individual TVDs, defense can also be used to inflict prolonged delay on the enemy with comparatively small forces on previously prepared sectors.

At the present time, one must take issue with those who assert, that with approximate parity of forces within the TVD, and with the sophistication of modern reconnaissance, the deployment of forces by an aggressor in, for example, Europe, is a chimera. Defending this opinion, they quite reasonably assert, that an aggressor can decide on an attack only if they will attain important strategic aims (for example, attaining the state frontier of the USSR) as a result of the first strategic operation.

To attain such an objective the aggressor would have to have a three- or four-to-one superiority in forces on main axes (and it is impossible not to agree with this). Evidently, to build up such a superiority secretly before the start of a war would hardly seem possible.

All this is true, if you do not consider a completely new qualitative improvement in the enemy's firepower, the sharply increased mobility of his shock grouping and what he recognizes as the main means of unleashing war – the surprise attack.

Even with a roughly equal balance of forces before the start of

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

military action, the enemy, having started the war by surprise, will attempt to shift this balance in his favour on individual directions. Evidently, such a situation can be attained during an air-land operation with the use of powerful fire strikes (*ognevymi udarami*) on corridors through our combat formations and by rapid insertion of strong groupings from mobile enemy infantry units, large scale air assaults (*desanty*), army aviation, specially trained diversionary and reconnaissance detachments (groups), and so on. The activity of these groups, evidently, will unfold with their flanks covered by unbroken fire. Bringing up our reserves will be impeded by deep fire strikes undertaken by aviation and long-range high-precision weapons.

Many might consider such a variant of the course of events as fantastic. But if we are not prepared for it in every way, this fantasy could become a terrible reality.⁶

Salmanov then underscored the central issue preoccupying the General Staff today, that of technology, stating:

In modern conditions, special timeliness and relevance (*aktual'nost'*) is accorded to those assets able to oppose new enemy weapons, which they plan to introduce into their armed forces during the next ten to 15 years. It is very important to find answers in time, which will guarantee reduction in the effectiveness of enemy land, air and sea launched high precision weapons, low-power lasers, designed to blind people and put observation instruments and sights out of action, radar-absorbent coverings, which can significantly reduce the effectiveness of our air defences in combating tactical aircraft, and so on.

... it is necessary to pay special attention to achieving reliable cover for second echelons, reserves, and also [logistic] targets in the rear against strikes by enemy aviation and high-precision weapons during the course of an air-land operation by them.⁷

Salmanov's arguments at the strategic and operational level have found their counterparts at the tactical level as well.

In the 1970s the Soviets developed the concept of *protivoiadernyi manevr* [anti-nuclear maneuver], which their maneuver specialist, F.D. Sverdlov, defined as "the organized shifting of subunits with the aim of withdrawing them out from under the possible blows of enemy nuclear means, to protect their survival and subsequent freedom of action to strike a blow on the enemy. Therefore, anti-nuclear maneuver is also one of the forms of maneuver."⁸ The defensive aspect

INTRODUCTION

of this maneuver was complemented by offensive measures “to rapidly disperse subunits or change the direction of their offensive ... and to conduct other measures related to defense against weapons of mass destruction.”⁹

The work of Sverdlov and other theorists in the 1970s led the Soviets to conclude that the most effective manner in which to conduct anti-nuclear maneuver was through expanded reliance upon operational and tactical maneuver. These concepts provided the basis for the emerging concepts of operational maneuver (by maneuver groups – the OMG) and tactical maneuver (by forward detachments), which had reached full articulation by 1980.

As recently as 1987 the concept of anti-nuclear maneuver still provided a cornerstone for Soviet operational and tactical techniques designed to preempt, preclude, or inhibit enemy resort to nuclear warfare. As articulated in 1987 by V.G. Reznichenko, “the continuous conduct of battle at a high tempo creates unfavorable conditions for enemy use of weapons of mass destruction. He cannot determine targets for nuclear strikes precisely and, besides, will be forced to shift his nuclear delivery means often.”¹⁰ In addition, by the mid-1980s, the Soviets had identified Western development of a wide variety of high-precision weapons as a major new threat. These weapons posed the same threat to attacking forces as tactical nuclear weapons, and in addition, the weapons promised a capability of more flexible engagement of attacking forces before such forces made actual contact with the enemy. The Soviets tentatively decided that even greater emphasis on operational and tactical maneuver was also a partial remedy to countering enemy use of high-precision weaponry.¹¹ To capitalize fully on the effects of maneuver, the Soviets believed that they had to reduce planning time and execute command and control more precisely. This required increased emphasis on the use of cybernetic tools, including automation of command and expanded reliance on tactical and operational calculations (nomograms, etc.).

The Soviets also realized that advantage accrued to that force which could quickly close with the enemy, thus rendering high-precision weapons less effective. This judgement, in turn, increased the significance of first echelons, operationally and tactically. Thus by 1987, in the tactical realm, Soviet writers were able to argue that “there arises the problem of defining the optimal structure for the first and second echelons at the tactical level. With the enemy using high-precision weapons, the role of the first echelon has to grow. It must be capable of achieving a mission without the second echelon (reserve).”¹²

Operational and tactical combat, in the Soviet view, “embraces

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

simultaneously the entire depth of the combat formations of both contending sides.”¹³ As a result, combat missions are no longer solely described in linear fashion by the seizure of lines. The new approach, according to Reznichenko in the 1987 edition of his book *Taktika*, is, “to determine them not by line, as it was done before, but rather by important area (objective), the seizure of which will secure the undermining of the tactical stability of the enemy defense.”¹⁴

Reznichenko and others now suggest that tactical missions call for securing objectives along multiple axes throughout the depth of the enemy’s defense, whose seizure fragments the defense and renders it untenable. At the tactical level, specifically designated and tailored maneuver forces (usually forward detachments) had earlier performed this function, while tailored operational maneuver forces did likewise at the operational level. Today, and in the future, all tactical units and subunits are likely to operate in this fashion.

This description of operational and tactical combat in future war has significantly altered traditional concepts of echelonment, not only by reducing the number of ground echelons, but also by supplementing the ground echelon with a vertical (air assault) echelon, which adds greater depth to battle. According to Reznichenko:

One can propose that, under the influence of modern weapons and the great saturation of ground forces with aviation means, the combat formation of forces on the offensive is destined to consist of two echelons – a ground echelon, whose mission will be to complete the penetration of the enemy defense and develop the success into the depths, and an air echelon created to envelop defending forces from the air and strike blows against his rear area.¹⁵

A 1988 article rounded out these descriptions by adding:

Modern combined arms battle is fought throughout the entire depth of the enemy combat formation, both on the side’s contact line [FLOT] and in the depth, on the ground and in the air.¹⁶

Consequently, the fragmented [*ochagovyi*] nature of battle will result in “mutual wedging [overlap] of units and subunits, which will have to operate independently for a long time.”¹⁷

Rounding out this description of future war, the Polish theorist, Colonel S. Koziej, recently identified five basic tendencies in ground force tactics driven also by the technological revolution. These he identified as:

INTRODUCTION

the transformation of traditional ground combat into air-land combat; broadening the role of mobility in all actions of troops; the development and generalization of training of combat actions within enemy formations, especially raiding actions; the initiation of battle at increasingly greater distances; [and] the growth of the significance of the "information struggle," which has as its objective to steer the enemy in the direction of one's own plans and intentions.¹⁸

In essence, what has emerged is a Soviet concept of land-air battle juxtaposed against the U.S. concept of air-land battle.

This systematic General Staff study of the nature of future war has noted the emergence of new factors and influences which may alter traditional frameworks for planning, conducting, and studying war. Technological changes, such as development of high-precision weapons, electronic warfare systems, new heliborne systems and forces, and even space weapons and weapons whose nature and effects cannot now be imagined can challenge the traditional linear nature of war, and in so doing require redefinition of the geographical content of war (theaters, TVDs, and types of axes [directions – *napravlennii*]), and the nature of missions and objectives. In essence, war is becoming multi-dimensional or, in the General Staff's language, "*ochagovyi*" – a war without front lines.

It is within the limits of "*ochagovyi*" war that Soviet tacticians are wrestling with the nature of future battle. The tentative answer which they have reached is that the key to success in future war, either defensively or offensively, is the ability to conduct operational and tactical maneuver. This work describes the process they have used to distill the essence of contemporary tactical missions and the conclusions they have reached. Obviously, these conclusions will also have significant implications for how the Soviets will structure their tactical forces for combat in the future.

NOTES

1. The *nomenklatura* is the finite group of party members in rank order who occupy key party, governmental, economic, and other positions within virtually all Soviet institutions. It, in essence, represents an upper class of communist "nobility."
2. For a superb study of how the Soviets approach future war in an historical and contemporary sense, see Christopher Bellamy, *Soviet Future War*, 2 vols. (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1990).
3. *Ibid.*, 51. The source is referred to as a "confidential discussion." It does, however,

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

match the traditional Soviet approach followed in earlier periods when the General Staff analyzed future war.

4. *Ibid.* This reflects the contents of G.I. Salmanov, "Sovetskaia voennaia doctrina i nekotorye vzgliady na kharakter voiny i zashchitu sotsializma" [Soviet military doctrine and some views on the nature of war in the defense of socialism], *Voennaia mys'* [Military thought], No. 12 (December 1988), 7–20; see almost identical concerns expressed in A. Kokoshin, A. Konovalov, V. Larionov, V. Mazing, *Problems of Ensuring Stability with Radical Cuts in Armed Forces and Conventional Armaments in Europe* (Moscow: Institute of USA and Canada Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences, 1989).
5. A. Kokoshin, "Alexander Svechin on War and Politics," *International Affairs*, No. 11 (November 1988), 121.
6. Salmanov, 9–10.
7. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
8. Among the many articles, see F. Sverdlov, "K voprosu o manevre v boiu" [Concerning the question of maneuver in combat], *Voennyi Vestnik*, No. 8 (August 1972), 31; V. Savkin, "Manevr v boiu" [Maneuver in battle], *Voennyi Vestnik*, No. 4 (April 1972), 23.
9. Sverdlov, "K voprosu," 31.
10. V.G. Reznichenko, *Taktika* [Tactics] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987), 72.
11. For example, see I. Vorob'ev, "Novoe oruzhie i printsipy taktiki" [New weapons and tactical principles], *Sovetskoe voennoe obozrenie* [Soviet military review], No. 2 (February 1987), 18.
12. Iu. Molostov, A. Novikov, "High precision weapons against tanks," *Soviet Military Review*, No. 1 (January 1988), 13.
13. Reznichenko, 200.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 206.
16. Molostov, Novikov, 13.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Stanislaw Koziej, "Anticipated Directions for Change in Tactics of Ground Forces," *Przegled Woisk Ladowych* [Ground Forces Review], No. 9 (September 1986), 9. Translated by Harold Orenstein in *Selected Translations from the Polish Military Press*, Vol. 1 (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1988), 7.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITIONS

When preparing to join battle or during the conduct of battle, Soviet forces are specifically arrayed to meet whatever situations arise. The Soviets term these arrays “march formation [*pokhodnyi poriadok*]” and “combat formation [*boevoi poriadok*].” The former is used on marches, during an approach to battle, during commitment into battle, and during exploitation and pursuit phases of an operation. The latter is used when forces prepare to engage and actually engage a defending enemy. Each of these arrays (or formations) includes specific elements assigned to perform separate functions. Taken together, their actions form a logical and cohesive approach to resolution of combat situations, an approach designed to produce successful results.

By Soviet definition, march formation is “the formation of subunits [battalions], units [regiments], formations [divisions], and groups of ships, with their reinforcing means, for the carrying out of a march ...”¹ March formations facilitate rapid movement, quick deployment of forces into pre-combat or combat formation, and reliable and stable command and control.

The march formation of combined arms formations [divisions] and units [regiments] consists of several distinct elements including a forward detachment, march security forces, a main force, and rear service units and subunits. Each of these elements performs a distinct military function. The forward detachment [*peredovoi otriad*] is the lead combat element of the force; march security forces [*pokhodnoe okhranenie*] perform reconnaissance [*razvedka*] and provide protection [*obespechenie*] for the main body; the main body [*glavnyi sil*] represents the principal combat element of the force; and rear service elements [*tylovie chasti*] sustain all force operations.

A wide variety of functional units perform combat, reconnaissance, and protection missions in support of the main force. These include:

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

<i>Function</i>	<i>Force</i>
Combat	forward detachment [<i>peredovoi otriad</i> – PO] enveloping detachment [<i>obkhodiashchii otriad</i>]
Reconnaissance [<i>razvedka</i>]	reconnaissance detachment [<i>razvedivatel'nyi otriad</i> – RO] reconnaissance group [<i>razvedivatel'naia grupp</i> a – RG] separate reconnaissance patrol [<i>otdel'nyi razvedivatel'nyi dozor</i> – ORD] reconnaissance patrol [<i>razvedivatel'nyi dozor</i> – RD]
Protection	advance guard [<i>avangard</i>] advance party (lead march party) [<i>golovnyi pokhodnyi zastav</i> – GPZ] flank party (flank march party) [<i>bokovyi pokhodnyi zastav</i> – BPZ] rear party (rear march party) [<i>tylovyi pokhodnyi zastav</i> – TPZ]
Others:	
Protection Against Weapons of Massive Destruction (ZOMP)	chemical reconnaissance patrol [<i>khimicheskii razvedivatel'nyi otriad</i>]
Engineer Protection	movement support detachment [<i>otriad obespecheniia dvizheniia</i> – OOD]
Sentry Security	outpost detachment (pickets) [<i>storozhevoi otriad</i>]

The forward detachment, whose function this book will discuss, is a unique organization specifically designated to fulfill combat missions which, if successfully performed, contribute to the success of the force as a whole. It normally leads the march formation and will, in turn, field its own reconnaissance and advance, flank, and rear security elements.

The reconnaissance task of a force in march formation is fulfilled by one of several types of reconnaissance units, differentiated primarily by size. Combined arms formations or units employ a reconnaissance

DEFINITIONS

detachment (RO) to obtain information about the enemy and the terrain both on the march and in anticipation of a meeting engagement.² The reconnaissance detachment usually consists of a motorized rifle, tank, or reconnaissance company of a regiment or a motorized rifle or tank battalion of a division, reinforced by artillery, tanks, sappers, chemical reconnaissance forces, and other specialized units as required. A smaller version of the reconnaissance detachment is the reconnaissance group (RD) which is usually of reinforced company size.

Reconnaissance detachments can also form and employ reconnaissance patrols (RDs) in up to reinforced platoon strength operating at varying distances from their parent reconnaissance units. In addition, formations and units can employ separate reconnaissance patrols (ORD) in lieu of, or in addition to, regular reconnaissance detachments or groups. The separate reconnaissance patrols of up to reinforced platoon strength operate analogously to the other large reconnaissance units.³

The mission of reconnaissance units is clearly distinct from that of the forward detachment. The function of the latter is to conduct combat, while the former are expected to avoid combat.

While reconnaissance units act as the eyes and ears of a force on the march, other units provide protection for the main force. Protection is subdivided by area into front, flank, and rear and involves units which provide march security for the main force. The most important of these units is the advance guard, which deploys forward in anticipation of a clash with the enemy.⁴ The advance guard usually consists of a regiment (from a division) or a battalion (from a regiment). Its missions are to prevent an enemy surprise attack on the main force, forestall penetration by enemy reconnaissance into the vicinity of the main force, and create favorable conditions for the deployment of the main force and its introduction into battle. While performing its mission the advance guard can engage and destroy enemy units but only if that combat does not inhibit fulfillment of its primary task.

The advance party (GPZ), a smaller version of the advance guard, is used in lieu of an advance guard by regiments marching along separate routes or by advance guards and forward detachments.⁵ It normally consists of a motorized rifle or tank platoon or company which moves along the march route in advance of its parent unit. Its missions are similar to those of an advance guard.

Flank parties (BPZ) and rear parties (TPZ) complete the all-round security for a force on the march.⁶ The flank party, of reinforced motorized rifle or tank company size, is sent out a distance of up to five

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

kilometers by forward detachments, advance guards, and main force regiments on the march to protect against enemy surprise attack, to frustrate enemy reconnaissance, and to facilitate deployment of its parent force. In turn, the BPZ dispatches security and reconnaissance patrol vehicles a distance of two kilometers. The rear party, in reinforced platoon or company strength, serves the same purposes as the flank parties.

These security forces protect both the forward detachment and main force column. In performing their functions they are subject to definite constraints, in particular regarding their involvement in any combat that would prevent accomplishment of their primary mission.

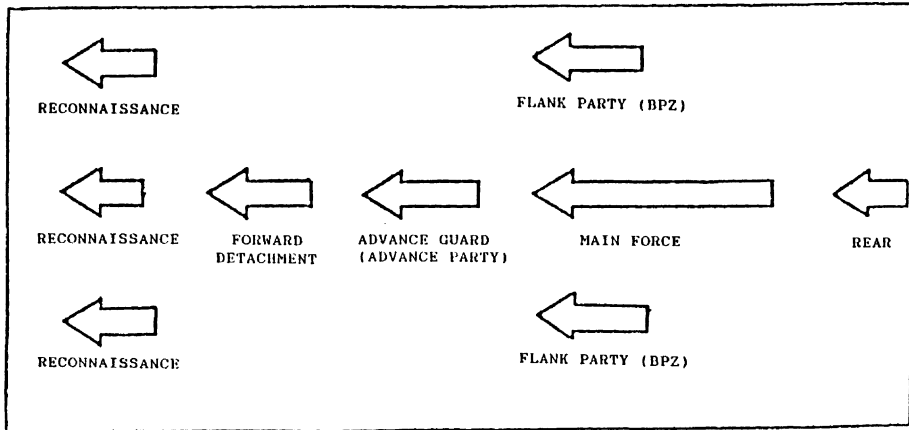
The Soviets employ other specialized elements during the conduct of a march. These include movement support detachments, chemical reconnaissance patrols, and outpost detachments. The movement support detachment (OOD) is a temporary formation of variable size, tailored to the situation. It normally consists of engineers, motorized rifle, tank, and other subunits and is tasked with preparing and maintaining march routes during all march situations.⁷ The OOD conducts route reconnaissance, builds and repairs routes, and prepares passages across manmade and natural obstacles. When conducting its missions, the OOD forms subgroups for reconnaissance, obstacle removal, road-bridge repairs, and combat security.

Chemical reconnaissance patrols (KhRD) supplement the action of regular reconnaissance units.⁸ They operate independently or as part of a reconnaissance or security element, a forward detachment, a movement support detachment, or a subunit tasked with securing or destroying nuclear or chemical stores. The KhRD detects radioactive, chemical, and bacteriological contamination; determines the level and type of contamination; designates the contamination area; and finds and marks routes through or around the contamination.

The least specialized of special march security elements is the outpost detachment which is used primarily during the positioning of forces – during halts or deployment in position.⁹ Outpost detachments of from company to battalion strength provide security, conduct reconnaissance, and defend in designated sectors. They employ outpost parties, observation posts, and patrols to a depth of 1,500 meters to protect the main force from surprise attack.

The diverse functional elements of the Soviet march formation are arrayed spatially to accomplish their primary task of ensuring the main force success (Figure 1). Reconnaissance elements lead, followed in turn by the forward detachment, an advance party and/or advance guard, the main force (usually organized in echelons), the rear party,

DEFINITIONS



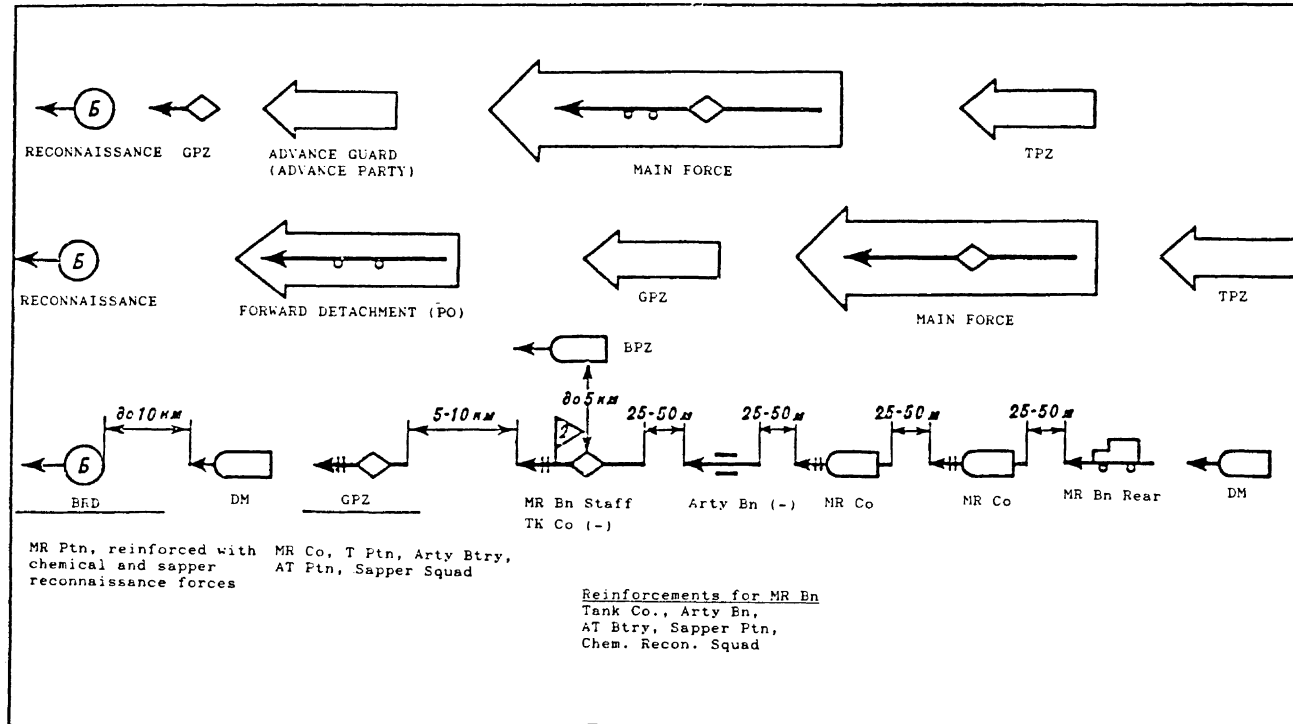
1. Principal elements of a march formation

and finally rear service units. The entire procession is flanked by security parties. Within this array the Soviets attempt to tailor and structure units and weaponry so that they can respond quickly in any combat situation. Often the Soviets will vary the array and structure of march formations to meet diverse needs (Figure 2).

Soviet combat formations display less variety than their march formations but are no less significant. The Soviets have included in their combat formations all those elements required to produce offensive success. They define combat formation as "the disposition (formation) of subunits, units, and formations and their reinforcing means for the conduct of battle."¹⁰ It is a combined arms concept whereby all types of forces fulfilling a common mission are united in a single combat formation. The combat formation "must reflect the concept of anticipated operations, provide for fulfillment of assigned combat missions, as well as firm continuous cooperation and command and control."¹¹

The elements of the combat formation include:

- forward detachment
- first echelon
- second echelon or combined arms reserve
- rocket subunits (groups)
- artillery means (groups)
- antiaircraft means (groups)
- antitank reserves
- engineer reserves



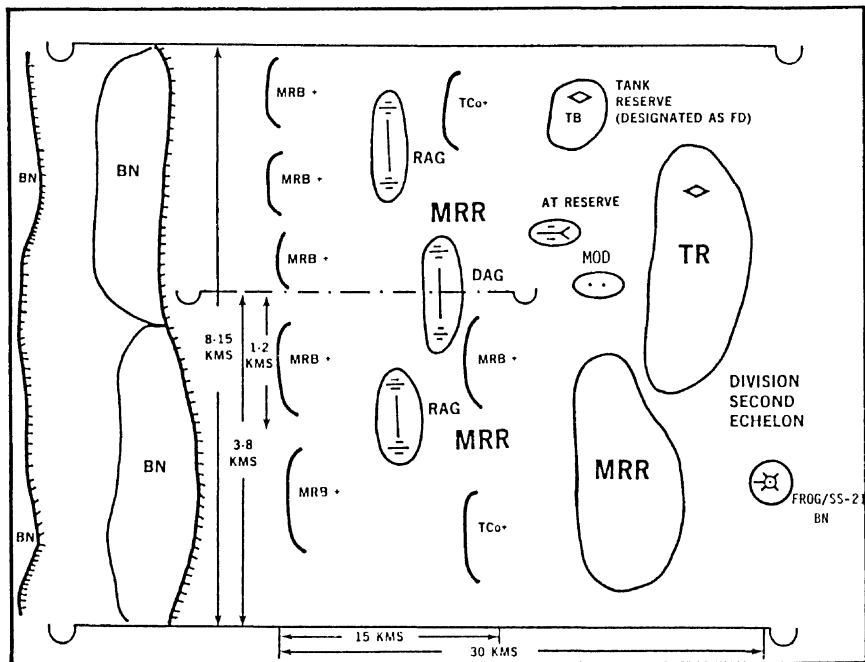
2. March formation in anticipation of a meeting engagement

DEFINITIONS

- mobile obstacle detachment [*podvishnyi otriad zagrazhdenii* – POZ]
- specialized detachments, *i.e.* enveloping detachments [*obkhodiashchii otriad*]
- tactical air assault landing group (party).

Virtually all elements of the combat formation are involved in combat or combat support tasks (Figure 3). All first or second echelon (reserve) units engage in tactical maneuver to some degree in battle. Certain of these elements, however, are created solely to perform the function of tactical maneuver – specifically the forward detachment; the enveloping detachment; the tactical air assault force; and, to a lesser extent, the mobile obstacle detachment.

MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION COMBAT FORMATION—1987 AGAINST A FULLY PREPARED DEFENSE



FIRST DAY
IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE—10 KMS
SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE—20 KMS

3. Combat formation (variant)

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The premier tactical maneuver force, the forward detachment, will be discussed later. An element closely associated with the forward detachment is the enveloping detachment, formed primarily for employment in mountainous terrain, but also used in deserts, forested swampy regions, northern regions, and other unusual terrain.¹² The enveloping detachment usually consists of a motorized rifle subunit, reinforced by mobile antitank weapons, mortars, guns, engineer subunits, and specialized forces. Its mission is to envelop the defending enemy, strike his flank and rear, and seize and hold important objectives in the depth of his dispositions. The enveloping detachment operates in tactical coordination with forces advancing from the front and is generally supported by forces and means of the senior commander.

The tactical air assault group (party) consists of combined arms subunits from reinforced company to regimental strength.¹³ Employed by formations (divisions) and large formations (armies), its missions include the seizure and destruction of important enemy objectives in the tactical and close operational depths (i.e. nuclear weapons, command and control points, communications centers) and seizure and destruction of tactically important positions and objectives (road junctions, bridges, river crossings, hydro-electrical facilities, mountain passes, passages, defiles, etc.). Tactical air assault is tasked with "cooperation with attacking forces in rapidly overcoming natural obstacles, interdiction of the maneuver of enemy forces, and insuring high offensive tempos; and destruction of rear bases, warehouses, and demolition of pipelines, etc."¹⁴ Air assaults are conducted by helicopter or fixed wing aircraft at tactical depths so that attacking ground forces can link up with air assault forces within several hours.

The third functional tactical maneuver force, the mobile obstacle detachment (POZ), provides specialized engineer support to attacking or defending forces. This "temporary military formation [is] created in ground forces from subunits (units) of engineer forces for construction of mine-explosive obstacles and execution of demolitions."¹⁵ Co-operating with combined arms forces (battalions and regiments) and antitank reserves, or sometimes operating independently, the POZ sows antitank and antipersonnel mines on likely enemy avenues of approach into the formation of attacking or defending forces. It also places obstacles in the gaps, on the flanks, and across the front of units as required by the tactical situation.

The forward detachment, enveloping detachment, and mobile obstacle detachment, by performing their distinct functions, bestow a special quality on the Soviet combat formation, particularly at the

DEFINITIONS

division level. They refine the combat formation and materially affect the ability of Soviet tactical units to perform combat missions successfully.

The forward detachment (to a lesser extent the enveloping detachment) and the tactical air assault group are the only elements of this entire mosaic of specialized functional units structured for and tasked with performing critical combat tasks. Those tasks differentiate them from all other elements and are the subject of the remainder of this book.

CHAPTER 2

COMBAT MISSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

GENERAL

Soviet operational and tactical techniques are founded on their general view of the nature of war. The Soviets recognize two basic realities in this regard. First, they understand that the achievement of a nuclear balance and the likelihood of future reductions in nuclear arsenals has contradicted the assumption of the early 1960s that general war will inevitably be nuclear. In fact, they now both hope and increasingly believe that mutual reluctance to unleash nuclear warfare will keep future war conventional. Regardless of this belief, they prudently recognize the possibility of nuclear weapons' use and hence have formulated conventional techniques usable in a nuclear-scared environment.

Second, the Soviets understand the accelerated pace of technological change which promises to make the conventional battlefield more lethal than before. In their view:

... fundamental changes which have taken place in the materiel foundation of warfare – the appearance of fundamentally new, high-precision enemy weapons; introduction of nuclear weapons into troop units; substantial improvement in existing types of military equipment; changes in the organizational structure of forces; and major changes in the weapons, troop organization, and operational tactics of the probable enemy have largely defined the nature of modern combat.¹

From this premise the Soviets have concluded that modern warfare will be combined arms warfare, characterized by decisive achievement of critical objectives; extreme maneuverability of weaponry, fires, forces, and nuclear weapons, if used; rapidly changing situations; development of high tempo land–air operations unfolding on a broad front and to great depths; sharply increased combat capabilities; and increased destructiveness of combat.

On this intense and fluid battlefield, advantage will go to the force

COMBAT MISSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

which can shift and concentrate resources rapidly and secretly. Deception and surprise will condition success, which can only be achieved by an opportunistic and swift advance. In the Soviets' words, "Success can be achieved most quickly and with the fewest losses by striking to destroy the will of the enemy and, hence, reduce the combat effectiveness of his troops."²

Further, the Soviets believe that "frontal blows unavoidably result in heavy losses."³ Thus they should be used only when destruction of the enemy's main force is at stake and critical objectives are involved. Otherwise, "strikes should be made against weak places in the enemy defense rather than to wear the enemy down."⁴

The Soviets believe that the most important factor in achieving offensive success under these circumstances is the artful use of rapid and deep operational and tactical maneuver:

The increased firepower and mobility of units and subunits and their use of new principles for waging combat have increased their independence and provided the possibility of operations when greatly separated from the main forces. This is also the basis for the assertion that in modern combined arms combat the role of forward detachments – mobile subunits operating in front of the main force – is increasing, and that broad possibilities for their use are opening up.⁵

MISSION AND COMPOSITION

The growing complexity of modern war has increased the variety of missions which a forward detachment can perform.⁶ So also has the nature of contemporary operations which will develop across a broad front and along separate directions. This milieu increases the possibilities for tactical maneuver. Further affecting how that maneuver will develop are other conditions, including: the terrain, nuclear situation, enemy strength and dispositions, and time factors.

A forward detachment normally consists of "a reinforced tank (motorized rifle, naval infantry) subunit [battalion] (unit [regiment]) tasked to perform independent specific missions during the course of battle."⁷ On the offensive, the forward detachment will be tasked with overcoming the enemy covering force area after the delivery of nuclear or conventional weapons strikes. Subsequently, the forward detachment will secure important objectives and sectors in the enemy's main battle area to facilitate the deployment, attack, and decisive advance of the Soviet main force.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

Once it has advanced into the depth of the enemy defense, the forward detachment will seek to inhibit movement of enemy reserves by pre-emptive seizure of key positions or by destroying the reserves in a meeting engagement. While in the depths of the enemy defense, forward detachments will engage and destroy any nuclear capable enemy unit in its vicinity.

On the pursuit, forward detachments cut off enemy withdrawal routes, inhibit enemy movement, and generally assist main forces in encircling and destroying withdrawing enemy forces. Forward detachments also play a key role in overcoming obstacles such as rivers, ridges, or difficult terrain by securing river crossing sites, mountain passes, defiles, and other routes through obstacles and holding them for the arrival of the main force. In defensive situations, forward detachments hold positions within the security zone and contest the enemy advance to provide time necessary for main forces to create and strengthen new defensive positions.

Forward detachments receive their missions prior to the commencement of the operation. The combat situation and local conditions dictate the composition of the forward detachment and the range and tempo of the mission. In general, the distance of its objective, fire suppression available, the availability and strength of cooperating forces (for example, air assault), and enemy strength determine required strength of the forward detachment. The forward detachment must be strong enough to sustain operations to the full depth necessary to accomplish its mission.

The number of forward detachments employed by a single force depends on the number of objectives and how critical each is. Operations along a single axis may require only one strong forward detachment, while operations along multiple axes may require two or three such detachments.

The location and commitment time of a forward detachment is dictated by the strength of the defense. In an operation against a strong defense, it will overtake first echelon units only after they have penetrated the first enemy defense belt. Conversely, in favorable conditions or against a weaker defense, forward detachments may advance before the penetration of forward enemy defenses is complete. Forward detachments will also operate in advance of newly committed second echelons to seize and hold positions in the depth of the enemy defense, to help fend off actions by enemy reserves and to assist in encircling enemy forces.

When nuclear weapons and other new means of destruction are not used, forward detachments will consist of motorized rifle subunits

COMBAT MISSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

reinforced with armor and other specialized forces. When nuclear or new high-precision weaponry is employed, BMP equipped motorized rifle or tank subunits, reinforced by armor, self-propelled artillery, reconnaissance, engineer, chemical defense, communications, and other specialized forces will be employed. Reinforcements are tailored so as not to hinder the mobility of the detachment. Often forward detachments will operate in tandem with tactical air assault forces.

Forward detachments can be formed from any element of the combat formation. Usually, however, they come from second echelon forces; but on secondary axes or in special situations, they may be formed from first echelon units. Most artillery, engineer, and reconnaissance reinforcements will be provided by the main force. In all cases, only the most experienced troops will be assigned to forward detachments.

In offensive combat the forward detachment usually has the mission of "seizing and holding important positions (objectives) in the depth of the enemy defense, and ensuring the high tempo and continuous advance of the main forces and favorable conditions for destroying the enemy, with the expenditure of the least forces, resources, and time."⁸

Defensively, forward detachments "provide time for the main forces to establish the defense and prepare counterattacks and counterstrikes capable of defeating the enemy offensive, by holding advantageous positions (objectives) in the security zone."⁹

CHAPTER 3

OFFENSIVE USE

GENERAL

The forward detachment participates in a broad range of offensive actions. First, it can operate against an enemy defense either from the march or from positions in direct contact with the enemy, with or without the support of nuclear fire. Once the enemy tactical defense belt has been penetrated, the forward detachment leads the operational exploitation and pursuit, helps encircle enemy forces, and destroys those which attempt to withdraw. Initially, or during the period of pursuit, the forward detachment may be called upon to overcome hasty enemy defenses. Finally, the forward detachment receives the task of overcoming obstacles from the march such as conducting river crossings or facilitating an advance through mountainous regions. As it accomplishes these exploitation tasks, it will often cooperate with tactical air assault forces inserted in the enemy rear area.

ORGANIZATION FOR COMBAT

The commander of Soviet forces conducting the offensive decides whether a forward detachment will be employed. Where possible, he makes this decision during the planning process. Hence, forward detachment operations are an integral part of the force's operational plan; and forward detachments are controlled directly by the senior commander.

The senior commander who decides to employ the forward detachment:

envision the mission ...; the axis of its operation; procedure for coordinating with first echelon subunits ...; procedure for coordination with a tactical air assault; procedure for artillery and air support; procedure for use of smoke and incendiaries ...; procedure for occupation of the attack position ...; and the

OFFENSIVE USE

procedure and direction of movement ... through the combat formations of his subunits [passage of lines].¹

All these matters, whenever possible, are worked out in detail and coordinated with the plans of other elements of the force.

When assigned a mission, the forward detachment receives an axis of operations (rather than a sector), and along the axis, the senior commander designates two or three objectives to be seized at varying depths in the defense and the time of seizure. The senior commander also determines artillery and air support for the forward detachment, procedures for coordinating the air assault, the route of movement, and time for the passage of lines.

If a forward detachment is hastily employed or already operating in the depths, it may receive only necessary reinforcements and an axis of operations. Subsequent elaboration on or alterations to the mission are sent by radio.

During offensive preparations, the forward detachment coordinates with the main force, other forward detachments, and with tactical air assault forces if they are employed. The senior commander spells out missions, locations of fires to be exploited, method of operation, nature and time of reinforcement, and detailed measures first echelon units will use to support the forward detachment. He also explains the missions of neighboring units and forward detachments and ensures coordination with them.

The senior commander designates artillery support for the forward detachment throughout every stage of its operation. This includes reinforcing artillery, support for its commitment into battle, support during operations in the depth of the defense, and support fire for assaults on objectives. Similarly, he arranges communications procedures with the main force command post and neighboring units, including signals for aircraft, warning signals for enemy use of chemicals or nuclear weapons, and procedures to delineate the exact location of the forward detachment.

After the forward detachment receives its mission and organizes coordination with all other forces, the senior commander monitors the preparation process and thereafter, when necessary, clarifies the mission and supports the advance with additional forces and fire. He is in continuous communication with the forward detachment.

Staff work in support of forward detachments is intricate and involves essentially all matters concerned with preparing the detachment to fulfill its mission and the subsequent active operations of the forward detachment.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

On his own part, the forward detachment commander must implement the senior commander's plan and instructions either before the operation, when en route to jumping-off positions, or during movement to his objective. He does so in detail while always considering the impact of each measure on prospects for accomplishing his mission and working to eliminate problems.

The forward detachment commander makes his decision based on his mission and an analysis of conditions. In part his decision involves determining: suitable pre-combat and combat formations; methods for exploiting preliminary or supporting fire; routes of movement; combat security measures, including continuous reconnaissance of his objective; probable location of encounters with enemy forces; concept of operations and axis of main attack toward his objective; deployment positions for his attack on the objective; missions of supporting artillery and mortar units; exploitation of helicopter and air strikes; air defense measures; coordination measures; and command and control procedures.

The forward detachment commander makes his decision and formulates his plan on a map. In doing so, he gathers and studies supporting data about the enemy and terrain on his axis of advance and near or on his objective. Thereafter he assigns missions to subordinate units and organizes cooperation among them, including selection of assembly areas and attack positions and the designation of communications procedures. He also closely coordinates his unit's actions with those of the main force and neighboring forward detachments.

After organizing cooperation, the forward detachment commander supervises the preparation of his forces and equipment and, if time permits, war games the operation on a map or on mock-up terrain and organizes exercises with commanders of subunits and reinforcements.

If limited time is available to organize the attack or a mission is received on the march, all these planning and supervisory tasks are accelerated. Planning then relies heavily on calculations and automation of procedures. If time is especially critical, the commander will issue his mission, march order instructions, and coordinating instructions by radio. In these circumstances, organization of combat security is particularly important because of the vulnerability of forward detachments operating deep in the enemy rear when the situation changes quickly and sharply. In this regard, special attention is paid to reconnaissance, *maskirovka*, engineer support, chemical support, protection of the force, and communications security.

Reconnaissance on the part of a forward detachment seeks to determine the composition, location, identity, combat effectiveness,

OFFENSIVE USE

and intentions of the enemy; the likelihood of chemical or nuclear attack and the location of these enemy systems; enemy strong points and weapons positions (especially antitank); enemy command posts and ambushes; engineer defenses (obstacles); gaps, open areas, and weaknesses in the enemy defense; location of destroyed, damaged or contaminated areas and routes around or through them; natural obstacles, other inhibiting terrain factors, road conditions, river barriers, and the existence of crossings over them.

The forward detachment conducts operational, radiation, chemical, bacteriological, artillery, and radar observation reconnaissance along its axis of advance. It obtains additional reconnaissance data via its main force headquarters from main force reconnaissance units and from aerial reconnaissance units operating over the depth of the enemy defense. When possible, helicopters perform reconnaissance of movement routes and the objective. The forward detachment uses its own combat reconnaissance patrols (RDs) immediately after receiving its mission. The patrols, in varying number and composition, receive their missions personally from the forward detachment commander who also details their method of operation. Using radio communications, the patrols then seek out key information on the enemy and terrain in accordance with the commander's instructions.

The forward detachment uses a system of warning signals, chemical observation posts, individual observers, and chemical reconnaissance personnel assigned to combat reconnaissance patrols to provide protection against weapons of mass destruction (ZOMP). ZOMP measures are organized before combat in all situations (nuclear and non-nuclear) and the forward detachment remains ready to undertake defensive measures against contamination or attack at any time.

The forward detachment uses *maskirovka* before and during its operations in concert with rigorous security measures to ensure secrecy of planning and preparation.² Active *maskirovka* measures are designed to confuse the enemy concerning the detachment's operational intentions, and passive measures (camouflage) conceal the forward detachment's strength, location, and activity as well as inhibit enemy reconnaissance. The commander organizes *maskirovka* measures according to plan in a timed sequence.

Engineer support of the forward detachment includes measures supervised by the commander to facilitate timely and concealed movement, deployment, and attacks; protection of the unit during enemy attacks; and active combat support as well. Engineer support includes engineer reconnaissance, creation of engineer fortifications and obstacles, building of assembly areas, assistance in overcoming

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

obstacles, and ensuring adequate supplies of water. When necessary, a variety of engineer plans are drawn up (for obstacles, destruction of objectives, etc.). In addition, engineers actively participate in implementing the *maskirovka* plan.

Chemical defense is carried out in close cooperation with chemical and radiation reconnaissance as an integral part of defense against weapons of mass destruction. It is continuous throughout all subunits of the forward detachment.

The forward detachment organizes march security to protect the unit from surprise enemy attack and from intrusion by enemy reconnaissance, and to gain time and create favorable conditions for its subunits to deploy and enter combat. Special emphasis is placed on securing the detachment's flanks. The commander specifies axes requiring special attention, determines the type, size, and location of security elements, indicates the timing and mission of security units, and designates the password.

Establishment of local security is the task of both the detachment commander and his subunit commanders. Because of the forward detachment's vulnerability, all-round security is continuous during the march, on its approach to combat, and during exploitation and pursuit phases. Forward detachments will be equipped with means to interfere with and reduce the effectiveness of enemy reconnaissance fire complex strikes.

March security organs operate at varying distances from the forward detachment suited to permit deployment and operations of its main forces. Most important are observation parties, patrol squads, or combat reconnaissance patrols employed to protect the detachment's flanks. In addition, special attention is paid to coordination between adjacent forward detachments regarding the problem of flank security. This is done primarily by constant close communications. When on its objective, the forward detachment defends its flanks by fire, use of reserves, and employment of obstacles (particularly antitank).

Successful forward detachment operations depend in large part on protection of communication links and command and control against direct attack and also enemy interference. The forward detachment commander uses alternate radio operating data and radio communications procedures designated by higher headquarters. He shifts to signals which facilitate transmission and reception of necessary information. Conversely, he arranges for the detection and destruction of enemy radio stations and enemy jamming stations along his axis of advance.

Command and control of a complex combined arms unit like a

OFFENSIVE USE

forward detachment requires skill on the part of the commander and his staff. Expressed succinctly:

The work of the forward detachment commander in organizing for combat requires of him thorough knowledge of the foundations of combined arms combat and the destructive factors of nuclear weapons and new means of destruction; knowledge of the tactics of the probable enemy and the basis for his use of nuclear weapons, as well as the tactical and technical specifications of the weapons and military equipment of his own troops and those of the probable enemy. Lacking this, the forward detachment commander, operating apart from the main forces and accomplishing important combat missions, will be unable to organize for combat independently, control the battle, and effectively use his weapons and military equipment.³

In short, a forward detachment commander requires knowledge, flexibility, and initiative. Lack of these traits, as experience has clearly shown, spells doom for the force – and perhaps for the offensive as a whole.

THE PENETRATION BATTLE

The experience of war has demonstrated the difficulties encountered when launching an offensive from the march or in direct contact with a defending enemy.⁴ In the past, only occasionally did forward detachments lead or participate in the initial assault. Today, due to the increased firepower and maneuverability of these units, in certain circumstances they can initiate the assault, in pre-emptive fashion or to facilitate the rapid advance of the main force.

In a nuclear environment, after a nuclear exchange, forces reestablish their combat effectiveness and undertake to complete the destruction of the enemy. "Formations [divisions] advance on their axes of attack from areas where they had restored their combat effectiveness and decisively move forward. In favorable conditions the offensive can be commenced by forward detachments."⁵

If nuclear weapons are not used:

The security zone [covering force area] is overcome by forces of the first echelon formations [divisions] after powerful air and artillery strikes on the most important objectives to the entire depth of the enemy defense. Forward detachments detached from each division destroy covering and security subunits [battalions] of the enemy and secure important objectives and areas in the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

forward defensive positions. Their operations are supported by artillery fire and air strikes in cooperation with operations of tactical air assault forces. Having overcome the covering force area, the forward detachments, supported by first echelon forces, penetrate the forward defensive positions from the march. If there is no possibility of creating conditions for the advance of the main force, the positions are overcome after a suitable preparation.⁶

These forward detachment operations, so critical for achieving success on the nuclear or high-technology battlefield, are complex and dangerous; thus they require precise planning and execution.

The forward detachment involved in the penetration operation can attack from the march or from positions in direct contact with the enemy. In the first instance, the detachment moves forward into the attack at a pre-arranged time and according to pre-arranged signals at maximum possible speed (up to 50 km/hour) (Figure 4). Lead subunits advance in march column (pre-combat formation) followed by reinforcing units. On the approaches to the enemy defense they deploy into combat formation without regrouping along pre-planned lines and commence their assault at maximum speed (Figure 5).

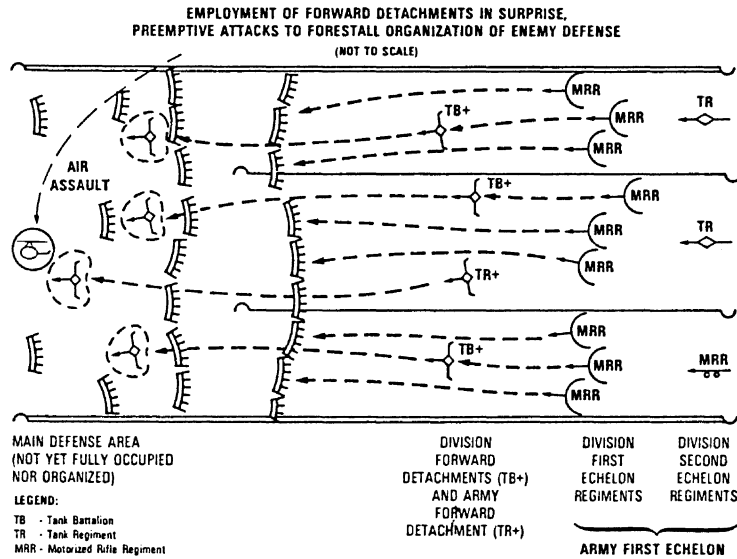
When assaulting the enemy security zone, the forward detachment avoids combat with covering forces, bypasses strong points, and moves rapidly forward to secure, from the march, positions or objective in the main enemy defense area. Artillery fire, air strikes, and helicopter fire support the forward detachment's advance.

The follow-on main forces penetrate the security zone normally in pre-combat formation, prepare to reinforce and exploit the efforts of the forward detachment, and break through the first enemy defense belt from the march. During passage of the security zone, commanders and staff officers conduct continuous reconnaissance of main enemy defenses and refine methods and procedures for the penetration operation and use of deep destructive fire.

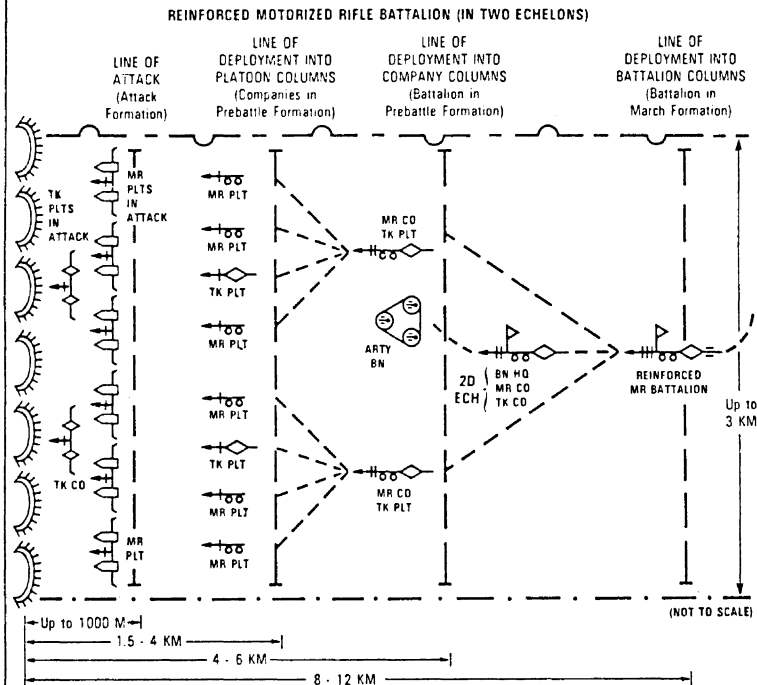
Forward detachments use reconnaissance during the attack to detect gaps in the enemy defense existing naturally or caused by nuclear or other fire. If a gap exists, or sectors of the defense have been suppressed, the detachment will move swiftly through the gap to secure its assigned objectives while avoiding combat and without diverting forces for suppression of individual centers of resistance. Those objectives may ultimately be in the positions of enemy brigade or division reserves.

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Combined Arms Army Offensive (Variant)

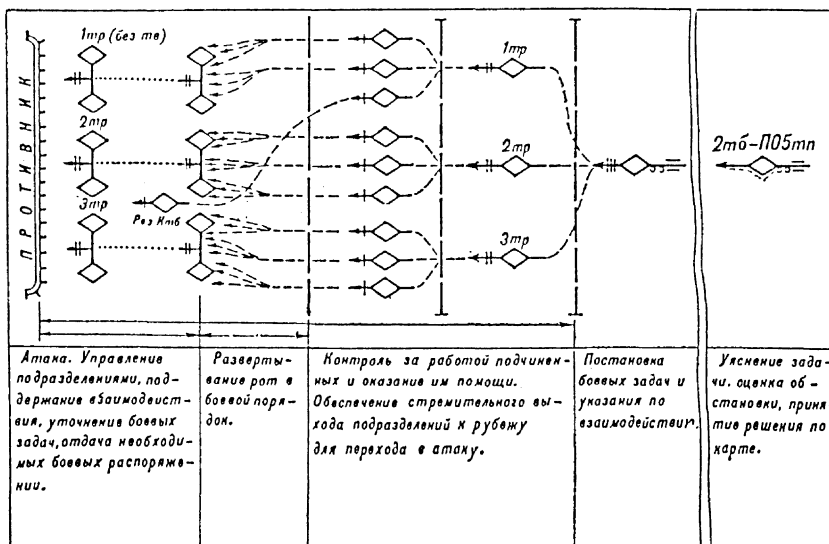


Deployment for an Attack from the March

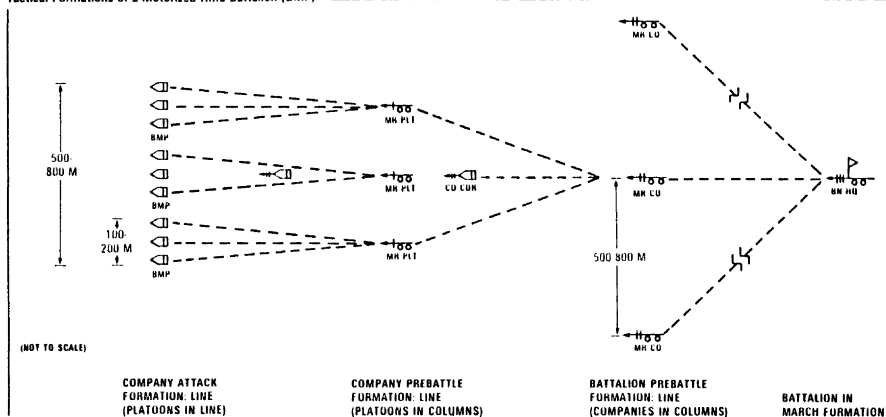


4. Attack from the march

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



Tactical Formations of a Motorized Rifle Battalion (BMP)



5. Deployment from pre-combat formation into combat formation

OFFENSIVE USE

The rapidity of the forward detachment's advance is ensured primarily by reliable suppression of the enemy by nuclear fire or artillery support from main force artillery and fixed-wing and helicopter units, as well as by active and effective operations by combat reconnaissance patrols and security subunits which carry out reconnaissance and neutralize individual enemy centers of resistance on the advance route of forward detachments. Forward detachments are expected to overcome radioactive or chemically contaminated regions at high speed, relying on individual and collective means of protection.

Throughout this process forward detachment main forces deploy for combat only when it is impossible to bypass centers of enemy resistance or when too much time is required for bypass. In this event the detachment deploys with tanks forward and mounted motorized rifle subunits behind and assaults from the march under cover of fire from tanks and BMPs.

It is more difficult for the forward detachment to conduct an assault from a position in direct contact with the enemy. Substantial regrouping of forces is required prior to the attack in order for the main force to concentrate necessary forces and weapons on main attack axes. Strict *maskirovka* measures conceal the regroupings, which normally occur at night or during periods of low visibility. Other forces strictly carry on routine activities to hide offensive preparations and intent.

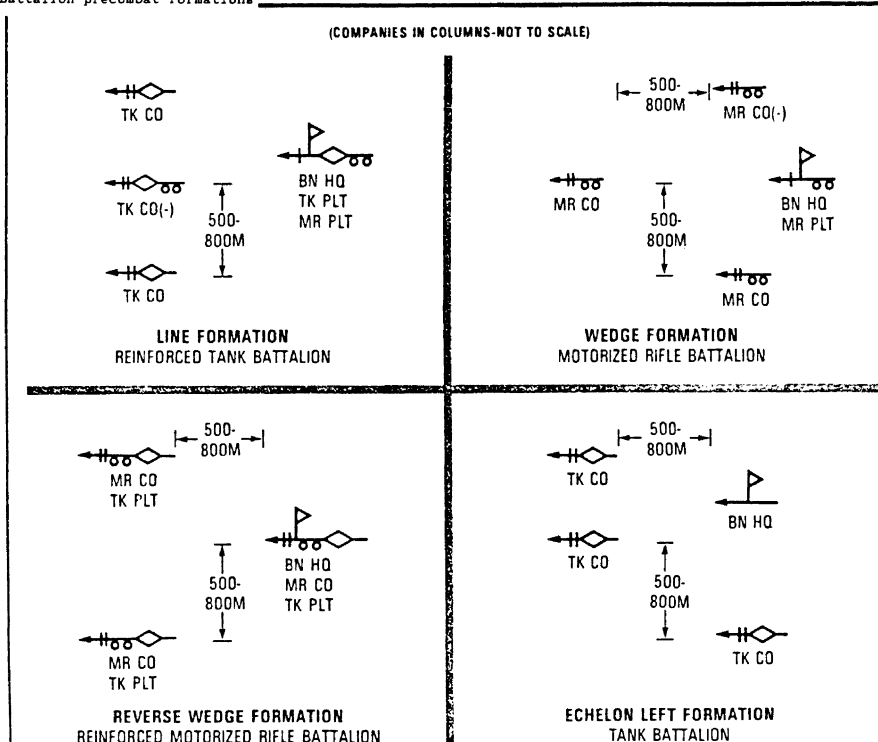
Forces move secretly from the rear into first echelon attack positions and are briefed on the enemy, terrain, and friendly situation by commanders whose units are already forward. Movement of tank and motorized rifle forces into assembly areas usually occurs the night before the attack. Units move from assembly areas into the attack at "H" hour, based, in part, on the distance to the forward edge of the enemy defense. As units begin the attack, tanks lead and motorized rifle subunits follow directly behind.

When commencing an attack in direct contact with the enemy, forward detachment organization and attack preparations occur in the attack positions which they occupy simultaneously with other regrouping forces. The precise location of the detachment in the attack formation depends on whether nuclear weapons are used and on the nature of the defense (Figure 6).

When a nuclear strike against enemy first echelon battalions precedes the attack, the forward detachment deploys with the first echelon into positions opposite where the nuclear strike occurred. If no nuclear strikes are used, or those strikes are only against the depth of the enemy defense, the forward detachment deploys with the second echelon, in an area which ensures rapid movement forward.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

Battalion precombat formations



6. Forward detachments in combat formation (variants)

Forward detachment subunits and reinforcements deploy as compactly as possible but seek to avoid the destruction of more than one company by a low yield nuclear weapon. So deployed, the detachment can move toward its objective as rapidly as possible. If natural masking exists (trees, shrubs, etc.), the detachment may form in columns of companies. If not, individual vehicles must be camouflaged in the attack area.

When advancing to the attack, the forward detachment moves in column formation with reconnaissance and security elements leading. This formation separates the detachment from the main force and facilitates subsequent rapid deployment into pre-combat and combat

OFFENSIVE USE

formation. The degree of concentration and the actual column structure reflect the mission and actual combat conditions. The desired end is to propel the force forward in as compact a body as possible to increase the weight and momentum of its attack. The detachment must also be structured to repel counterattacks from every quarter.

If a nuclear strike precedes the attack, the forward detachment advances in pre-combat or column formation led by combat reconnaissance patrols and security elements. Tank and self-propelled artillery subunits, at the head of the main column, provide support to reconnaissance and security elements and cover the deployment of motorized rifle forces, if necessary. Motorized rifle subunits on BMPs directly follow the tanks and, when necessary, attack in either mounted or dismounted fashion. To close with the enemy even more rapidly, motorized rifle subunit personnel may ride directly on the assaulting tanks (tank *desant* [*tankovyi desant*]).

Supporting forces are carefully integrated into the attacking forward detachment column. Artillery subunits deployed in the main force column should be able to deploy rapidly and fire and defend the column against surprise attacks. Antitank subunits are integrated into the march structure down to motorized rifle company level to provide immediate combined arms antitank defense and antitank support during actual assaults. Air defense units are located throughout the column to cover it against air strikes. Combat engineers concentrate their efforts nearer the head of the column and along the flanks to assist in maintaining rapid movement and to use obstacles to defeat enemy surprise attacks.

Nuclear and/or conventional fires strike first enemy defensive positions just prior to the ground assault. During this artillery preparation, engineers prepare passages through any obstacles covering the enemy defensive position with bridge layers and route clearers assisted by tanks with bulldozers. Simultaneously, engineers and the movement support detachment (OOD) mark the routes and organize a traffic control system.

When main force first echelon subunits reach the forward edge of the enemy defense, they destroy or suppress enemy strong points assisted by combat helicopter strikes and artillery and air units, which now shift from preparatory fire to fire support of the attack. In fire planning, enemy tanks, other armored targets, and antitank weaponry are priority targets.

After overcoming enemy strong points in the forward edge of the defense, attacking first echelon subunits develop the penetration to the flanks and the rear to roll up enemy defenses, smash reserves,

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

neutralize enemy artillery units (particularly nuclear-capable) and seize specific objectives in the depth of the defense. Those motorized rifle units which dismounted for the assault now remount and continue to follow the attacking tanks. New combat reconnaissance patrols are fielded forward to support the developing attack.

Once initial success has been achieved, the main force second echelon joins the attack, planned tactical air assaults begin, and forward detachments advance to join the offensive. The forward detachment commander receives an updated mission, reviews his tasking and organization, and personally coordinates with the subunit commanders through whose sector the detachment is being committed. Advancing first echelon subunits are responsible for providing security and fire support for the forward detachment's passage of lines. This support is designed to enable the forward detachment to attack into the gap at high speed, without halting, in order to break free in advance of the main forces and penetrate deep into the enemy defense.

Thereafter the forward detachment operates as if it were conducting an attack from the march against an enemy lacking organized defenses or occupying only a hasty defense.

The complexities of the penetration battle require considerable flexibility on the part of the forward detachment commander. He and his unit must be trained to adjust to a wide variety of rapidly changing combat situations and to adapt procedures and techniques to overcome problems which arise at any time.

Forward detachments will normally employ several combat reconnaissance patrols of from platoon to reinforced company strength and an advance party (GPZ) of like strength, but usually a reinforced tank company. These units provide warning and intelligence and can deal with enemy opposition if their strength is suited to the task. In addition, the advance party can occupy enemy attention sufficiently for the forward detachment to maneuver and destroy the opposing force or it can summon fire support to destroy the defending enemy unit and prevent deployment and subsequent delay of the forward detachment.

If resistance is great in the main enemy defensive position, forward detachments may simply join the operation of the first echelon. Later in the operation, if circumstances permit, it can resume its separate operations or a new subunit may be designated as a forward detachment with a similar or entirely different set of objectives.

If a nuclear strike is made against enemy brigade or division reserves, forward detachments join battle only after main forces have successfully penetrated the defenses of first echelon enemy brigades. In this case the forward detachment advances with second echelon units.

OFFENSIVE USE

Because of the distances involved, there is less likelihood of damage from an enemy nuclear strike. The forward detachment seeks to find and exploit gaps blown in the defense by the first echelon and rapidly advance toward its deep objective. To exploit the time factor and more rapidly exploit the nuclear strike, the forward detachment may follow immediately on the heels of first echelon penetrating units and pass through them as soon as they have completed penetration of the forward defensive positions.

It is particularly important that the forward detachment reach the area of the nuclear strike in advance of enemy reserves and be prepared to repulse counterattacks by enemy units attempting to close gaps. Such a mission is a prime criterion for determining the strength of the detachment. If an enemy unit succeeds in erecting defenses before the arrival of the forward detachment or closes the gap, the forward detachment attacks the enemy from the march, seizes the position, and holds it until the arrival of the main force. When the forward detachment fails to dislodge the enemy, it occupies favorable defenses and ties down the enemy by fire until arrival of the main force.

When engaged in an offensive against a defending enemy without use of nuclear weapons, the forward detachment is committed to combat after first echelon forces have penetrated enemy first echelon brigade defenses. To do so earlier would involve costly battles to penetrate strong defenses and impair the ability of the forward detachment to conduct subsequent operations. The primary task of the forward detachments in these circumstances is to pre-empt, engage, or overcome enemy defenses between first echelon brigade defenses and enemy division reserves. The relative paucity of prepared enemy defenses in this region permits the forward detachment to maneuver more freely and advance more rapidly. The chief defenses to the rear of enemy first echelon brigade positions are intermediate or switch positions and individual strong points. In addition, the area will contain withdrawing enemy units and reserves maneuvering to conduct counterattacks or erect new defenses.

To overcome resistance in this region, the forward detachment uses its combat reconnaissance patrols (BRD) and advance party (GPZ) to destroy smaller enemy groups. When encountering a larger enemy force, the forward detachment uses its advance party or other subunits to pin the enemy down and maneuvers its main force to crush the enemy and proceed to its objective.

When confronted by intermediate or switch positions, the forward detachments conduct reconnaissance to discern gaps or weak points and then engage the enemy by maneuver. If this method fails, the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

detachment concentrates its forces in a narrow sector, attacks, and penetrates the defenses. If failure persists, another attempt must be made in another sector. Further failure will force the forward detachment to disengage and bypass the position or seek assistance from the main force.

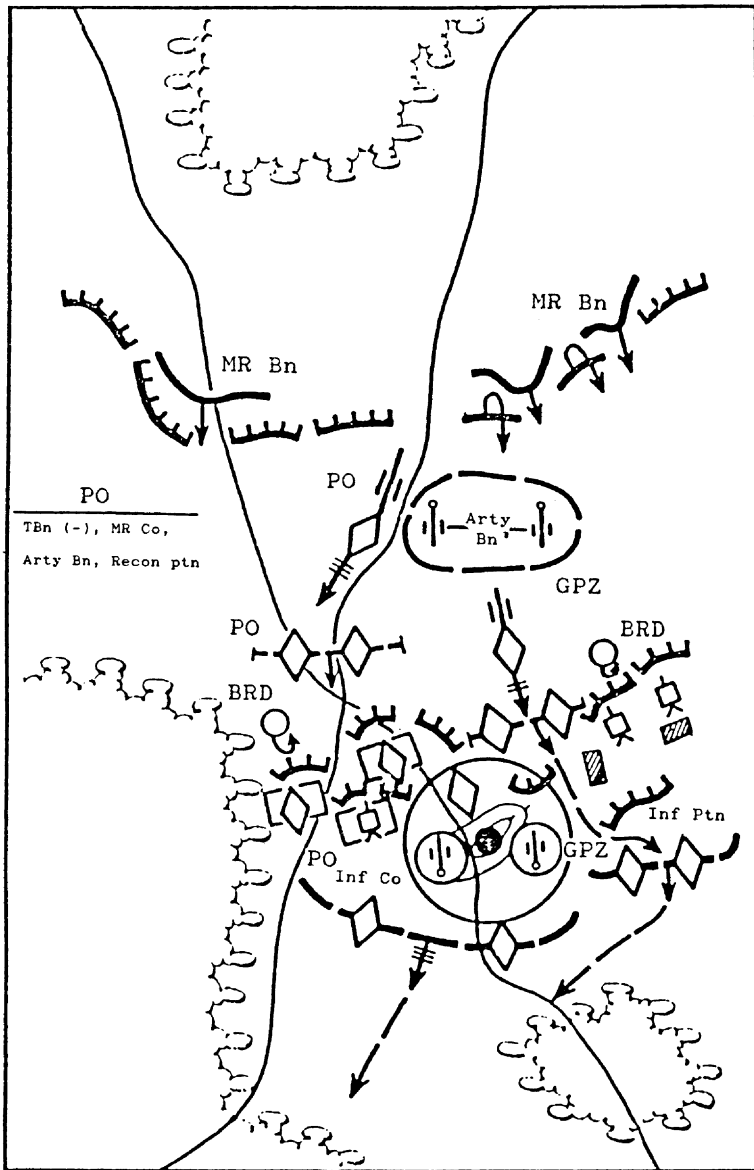
Forward detachments must bypass major enemy strong points which its security elements or its main body are unable to overcome. Here the critical deciding factor is the time necessary to overcome the strong point. In all cases the Soviets prefer to reduce strong points by mounted assault. When encountering deploying enemy reserves, the forward detachment acts in accordance with its priority mission – to secure its objective in the enemy division reserve area. This may involve engagement and destruction of the enemy or bypass of the enemy units. If it fails to do either and the reserve is sizeable, the detachment occupies defensive positions and ties down the enemy until the arrival of the main force.

The most critical moment for the forward detachment is when it approaches its ultimate objective in the enemy's division reserve area. By this time it is likely the detachment's strength will have eroded somewhat, and enemy reserves or withdrawing forces may be defending in the area. The forward detachment must seize and hold its objective, however difficult it may be. To do so the detachment concentrates all its forces and weapons to achieve superiority in the most vulnerable enemy sector. It then pre-emptively seizes the objective and erects defenses or seizes the objective in combat.

When preparing to secure an objective already defended by the enemy, the forward detachment commander modifies his plans and the missions of subordinate units. He must not drastically change his earlier decision or significantly restructure his pre-combat (or combat) formation or redistribute his forces and weapons. This takes too much time and is permissible only if the situation has sharply changed or the mission of the detachment has been altered. In all cases, restructuring should be made as quickly and secretly as possible.

If a nuclear strike precedes the attack on its objective, the forward detachment deploys at a safe distance and then, immediately after the strike, attacks to secure its objective and erect defenses. If a nuclear strike is not employed, the forward detachment first deploys its advance party into combat formation and then orders it to attack from the march (Figure 7). The advance party disrupts the enemy fire support system, seizes advantageous positions, and supports deployment of the forward detachment's main force. If the advance party

OFFENSIVE USE



Actions of a forward detachment in the tactical zone of the enemy defense.

7. Forward detachment in the penetration

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

attack fails, it digs in, conducts reconnaissance, and covers deployment of the remainder of the detachment.

While the advance party is engaging the enemy, other forward detachment subunits continue their forward movement, the commander conducts visual reconnaissance with his subunit commanders and issues them with new missions and coordination procedures in time for arriving subunits to deploy into attack positions. Subunit commanders transmit new missions to their subordinates by radio or in person.

Subsequently, forward detachment subunits attack the objectives from the march. Artillery and mortars of the forward detachment support both the deployment and the attack. Tanks lead the attack by developing the success of the advance party and are followed by motorized rifle units on BMPs. To generate maximum force superiority necessary to overcome the enemy defense and employ maneuver to a maximum degree, the forward detachment commander usually structures his force in single echelon with a strong reserve.

If possible, the forward detachment strikes the enemy on the flank or in a sector of detected weakness. While a portion of the force pins down the bulk of the enemy, the remainder envelops or outflanks the enemy. When reconnaissance detects no weakness in the defenses, the forward detachment will concentrate against that enemy sector which appears to be the weakest, at least in terms of fire support.

After a successful attack, the forward detachment consolidates its position on the objective and establishes a perimeter defense. If a forward detachment is fortunate enough to seize its objective without a fight, it consolidates, defends, and awaits the arrival of the main force. Simultaneous successful operations by several forward detachments operating along parallel axes force the enemy to disperse his forces, destroy the continuity of the defense, and make it difficult for counterattacks to dislodge or destroy any single forward detachment.

If, during the course of the forward detachment's advance, enemy counterattacks fail, the forward detachment continues a rapid advance toward its objective to prevent the withdrawing enemy from occupying it. If the forward detachment fails to intercept the enemy before it establishes a defense, it sweeps past the enemy, strikes enemy positions from the flanks or rear, and sizes and holds a sector of the objective until the main forces arrive. In all cases, the forward detachment must endeavour to maintain close contact and constant pressure on the withdrawing enemy units.

Once the forward detachment is defending on its objective, the main force commander will, if possible, support the defense with artillery

OFFENSIVE USE

fire and fixed wing and helicopter air strikes. The forward detachment employs a single echelon defense with a strong reserve and employs standard tactics in defensive fighting.

Subsequent forward detachment operations depend on the situation. If the forward detachment has secured its objective and the main force advance is developing favorably, the detachment can expand its defenses to create an even larger gap for exploitation by the main force. When the main force reaches forward detachment positions, the detachment may continue operations with main force first echelon subunits or, at the direction of the senior commander, it may revert to reserve, in order to refit and prepare for a new mission.

EXPLOITATION AND PURSUIT

In the past, Soviet forward detachments have played their most successful role in the exploitation phase of an operation and during pursuit.⁷ Most levels of command, from army down through corps to division and, sometimes, even regiments, employed forward detachments in tandem to increase the tempo of the offensive, maintain pressure on a withdrawing enemy, and secure objectives whose seizure would facilitate the advance of the main force.

These forward detachments led the operations of operational maneuver forces as well as main force units. Although they usually operated on a tactical scale, in larger, more mature operations their actions had operational consequences.

In general, their primary task was to master the art of independent operations, separate from the main force, and to achieve their objectives without becoming victim to isolation and defeat in detail. Soviet success in these experiences has reinforced their optimistic view of the positive role these units can play in contemporary combat.

Once Soviet forces have penetrated the full depth of enemy tactical defenses (a depth of 30–50 kilometers), main forces will develop the offensive into the operational depth and simultaneously along the flanks. In this period the enemy will counterattack and attempt to create new defense lines. The Soviets use nuclear fires, and/or the fires of artillery, aircraft, and helicopters and operations by forward detachments and tactical air assaults to forestall enemy attempts to recreate a defense.

Forward detachments coordinate with tactical air assault forces to seize intermediate defense lines from the march, prevent the enemy from consolidating new defenses, and ensure a high tempo of main force exploitation. In turn, the main force exploits the forward

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

detachment's success. Forward detachments overcome enemy forces either from the march or by fully deployed assault. Enemy counterattacks are first engaged by fire support means and then by the forward detachment. If the counterattack is severe, first echelon main force subunits, antitank reserves, and mobile obstacle detachments deploy forward to assist the forward detachment. Meanwhile other main force units envelop the enemy and destroy him by attacks from the flank and rear. Combat helicopters play a decisive role in providing support for the forward detachments and exploiting main force units, in particular against armored targets.

Air defense units are concentrated on the most critical axes to cover the operation of forward detachments and first echelon units (in addition to the detachment's organic air defense support) and to help in repulsing counterattacks. Motorized rifle and tank subunits concentrate on destruction of enemy ground attack helicopters.

Forward detachments also assist first echelon subunits in surrounding separate enemy groups, usually in tandem with tactical air assaults. First echelon subunits maintain all-round pressure on surrounded enemy units while the coordinated fires of helicopters, aircraft, and artillery accomplish the primary role of destroying surrounded units. All operations to reduce encirclements are well coordinated with precise axes of operations, fire boundaries, and mutual recognition signals and procedures.

The forward detachment is tailored to perform a variety of tasks during the exploitation and pursuit phase of the operation in accordance with the enemy, terrain, and duration of operations. It receives an axis of operations and procedures for artillery and air support. Precise forward detachment tasks are dictated by the nature of the operations and local combat conditions. In general, the higher the offensive tempo and depth of required operations, the larger the detachment will have to be. Pursuit operations are characterized by continuity; decisiveness; fragmentation and destruction of the enemy; bold and high tempo operations; maximum use of forward detachments, air assault, and helicopter and air assets; great depth and breadth of operations; high maneuverability; and rapid transition from various types of combat.

Forward detachments conducting exploitation and pursuit seek to facilitate encirclement, destruction, or capture of withdrawing enemy units. If pursuit fails to encircle the enemy, detachments must then split up enemy formations, render them incapable of resistance, and then encircle and destroy their fragmented force. Throughout the process, forward detachments must be ready to destroy immediately any enemy

OFFENSIVE USE

nuclear units it detects. To achieve these aims, forward detachments advance swiftly along the designated axis deep into the enemy defense, bypass separate enemy centers of resistance, and seize a series of designated objectives, if possible from the march. They hold these objectives until relief by the main force.

Often a tactical air assault force will cooperate with a forward detachment in the seizure of an objective. The tactical air assault force lands secretly and quickly and advances to secure and hold its objectives until link-up with the forward detachment. Objectives secured by forward detachments serve as a base for subsequent offensive action or cover the flanks and critical approaches on the main force axes of advance. Usually, main force units will relieve the forward detachment and release it for use on new missions.

The high tempo of the advance permits reduction of the distance between the forward detachment and main force. This reduces the vulnerability of the detachment to counterattack and maintains the cohesion of the entire attacking force. It also improves the maneuverability of attacking forces, expands the scope of operations, and makes it more difficult for the enemy to respond effectively. It is especially critical to match the size of the forward detachment to the depth of its operation. Only a proper match will ensure the survivability of the detachment and the success of the entire force. Ultimately, only timely support by the main force and by helicopter units enable the forward detachment to operate independently and yet survive.

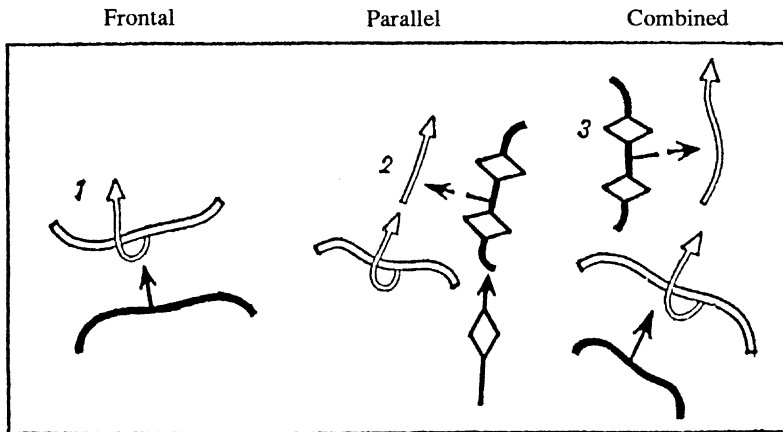
Pursuit operations are conducted on a broad front designed to exploit large gaps between withdrawing forces. Forward detachments use these gaps to thrust deeply into the enemy rear in an attempt to seize vital road junctions or terrain features which will disrupt the withdrawal and subject the enemy to destruction by the main force. To hinder enemy attempts to maneuver around forward detachments and tactical air assaults, blocking positions and radioactive (and chemical) contamination areas are employed to canalize enemy movements.

Success in the pursuit depends on effective coordinated action by forward detachments, tactical air assault forces, and main force reconnaissance units. Pursuit may begin as early as during penetration of the enemy tactical defenses or at any time thereafter.

The forward detachment can conduct either parallel pursuit or pursuit directly along routes used by the enemy (Figure 8). The former is more effective, for it permits the forward detachment to first dismember and then strike the flanks and rear of withdrawing enemy units. Since enemy withdrawal will usually be along parallel lines, ground, artillery, or air strikes are necessary to deny the enemy the use

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

of some routes, thus creating gaps which forward detachments can exploit. Speedy operations by forward detachments and main force action make it possible for them to outstrip withdrawing enemy units and preemptively secure objectives in the enemy's rear.



8. Methods of pursuit of the enemy

Depending on the situation, multiple forward detachments can conduct parallel pursuit in a broad sector. If pursuit begins in the tactical defense zone, the initial forward detachment begins its conduct. New forward detachments are employed only if the original detachment has been weakened in previous operations. Old forward detachments usually receive their new mission by radio while the commanders of newly created forward detachments normally receive their orders in person.

As in the penetration phase, in the pursuit the senior commander assigns the pursuit mission and arranges for coordination between the forward detachment, main forces, neighboring units, and air support. Effective coordination is essential for achieving success in the pursuit phase, and it involves such matters as artillery and air fire support, reconnaissance, materiel support for the forward detachment, and communications and recognition signals. Adjacent forward detachments must also coordinate their operations closely. Coordination on the march is effected by the forward detachment commander.

Effective reconnaissance and security are decisive ingredients for success in forward detachment pursuit operations. In addition to main force reconnaissance operations forward, the forward detachment sends out its own reconnaissance units, usually one or two combat

OFFENSIVE USE

reconnaissance patrols (BRD). These patrols operate at greater distances from the forward detachment than during the penetration phase of the operation. Forward detachments also employ march, flank, and rear security units to protect the marching column and perform the normal function of early warning and defense.

The forward detachment's march column formation is itself designed to match the detachment's mission and facilitate seizure of detachment objectives. A primary consideration is to create a capability for all-round action. This requires maintenance of a strong reserve (normally tank and engineer). When approaching its objective, the forward detachment employs the same tactics it used to deal with enemy positions in the depth of the enemy's tactical defense.

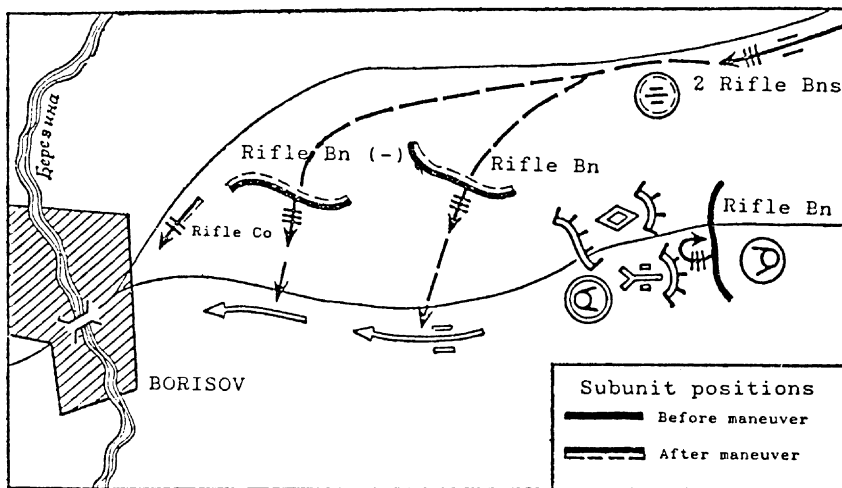
If nuclear strikes are planned during a pursuit, the forward detachment plays an important role by seizing key terrain and restricting enemy forces to the planned nuclear strike region. To protect itself, just prior to the strike the forward detachment secretly and quickly withdraws to safety. This requires careful coordination with the nuclear unit as to the precise location and time of the strike. After the nuclear strike, the forward detachment reoccupies its position, if necessary, to destroy enemy remnants, and thereafter receives a new mission.

Often during the pursuit, the forward detachment will encounter a hasty defense erected by withdrawing or reinforcing enemy units or reserves (Figure 9). Hasty defenses, encountered initially in the operation or in subsequent phases, differ fundamentally from prepared defenses, particularly in regard to organization of fire, engineer preparation, continuity, and command and control. Forward detachments are tailored to exploit those weaknesses.

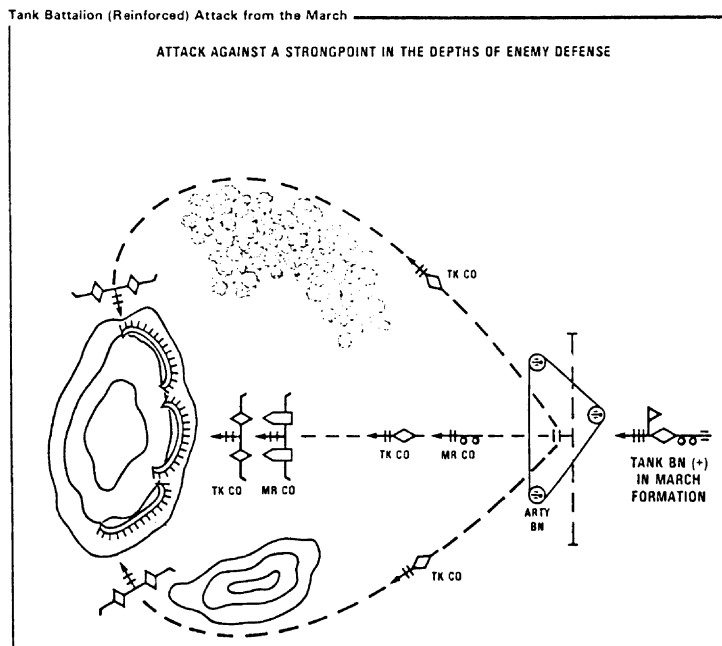
Against a hasty defense, the forward detachment attacks from the march after only limited preparation, for loss of time will quickly convert the hasty defense into a prepared defense. When informed of the enemy's presence by his reconnaissance or that of higher headquarters, the forward detachment commander rapidly assesses the situation, reaches a decision, and assigns missions to his subordinates by radio. There is no time for detailed coordination on the ground. Tank and motorized rifle company commanders and those of reinforcing units conduct visual observation and reconnaissance and then issue orders to their units. A hasty tactical air assault force may cooperate with the forward detachment's assault.

The forward detachment commander designates the line of passage to the attack; and artillery units commence a preparation while the tank and motorized rifle subunits deploy from the march. The preparation

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



Maneuver during pursuit of the enemy



9. Forward detachment operations in the enemy tactical defense zone

OFFENSIVE USE

concentrates on suppression of strong points, ATGMs, antitank guns, and mortars revealed by the combat reconnaissance patrols. When subunits commence the assault, part of the artillery conduct direct fire to suppress enemy firing means. Tanks and self-propelled artillery join in direct firing during the preparation. If conditions permit, forward detachment security subunits may begin the assault; and main subunits are committed to the assault as they arrive. This is feasible, however, only if enemy fire has been reliably suppressed by artillery fire and air strikes and if security subunits were successful in their attack. Otherwise, the assault must be a planned and coordinated one by the concentrated force of the forward detachment usually launched in single echelon formation with a reserve. Artillery, mortars, combat helicopters, and aircraft support the assault.

In either the piecemeal or concerted attack, once defenses have been overcome, the forward detachment consolidates its position and prepares to resume its mission after the arrival of the main force.

If main force elements are in close proximity to the forward detachment as it prepares an attack on a hasty defense, the forward detachment commander will wait for the assistance of main force elements. If other forward detachments are in the region, he will coordinate his detachment's assault with theirs to create maximum effect on the enemy defensive position. Should repeated forward detachment attacks on a hasty defense fail, it will consolidate its position and await assistance from the main force. Forward detachments will employ the same technique against an enemy rear guard, although success is more likely because of the relatively open flanks of such a force.

Once a forward detachment has penetrated a hasty defense and seized its objective, it halts, consolidates its position, and erects a strong, single echelon all-round defense to await the arrival of the main force. Most subunits will operate according to existing instructions and established unit procedures (SOPs). Later the commander will detail new missions and refine the defenses. The defense is organized according to established defensive tactics and similar to defenses erected around objectives in the tactical defense zone. On objectives of great tactical significance commanders will pay particular attention to defensive measures against weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical).

Forward detachments, by virtue of their mission, long experience, and tailored composition are best suited to conducting pursuit operations. They serve operational maneuver elements operating deep in the operational depths or main forces at shallower depths. In both cases, they are the very tip of the offensive spearhead; and they serve as the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

glue which holds the entire advancing force together and makes it a coherent force. Their success, to a large degree, conditions the success of the offensive force as a whole. While they have an immense effect on combat itself, their effect is also psychological. Their appearance in great numbers tends to paralyze a defending force, in particular its command and control. In this context they operate in a military sense, but also in a less tangible sense, against the will of their opponent. If successful, they can create havoc in a defense. If unsuccessful, their failure can have a major adverse effect on the success of the offensive as a whole. This, in part, explains why the Soviets have spent so much time analyzing experiences in the use of forward detachments, working on procedures for their proper use, and training officers to display the flexibility and initiative necessary for them to succeed.

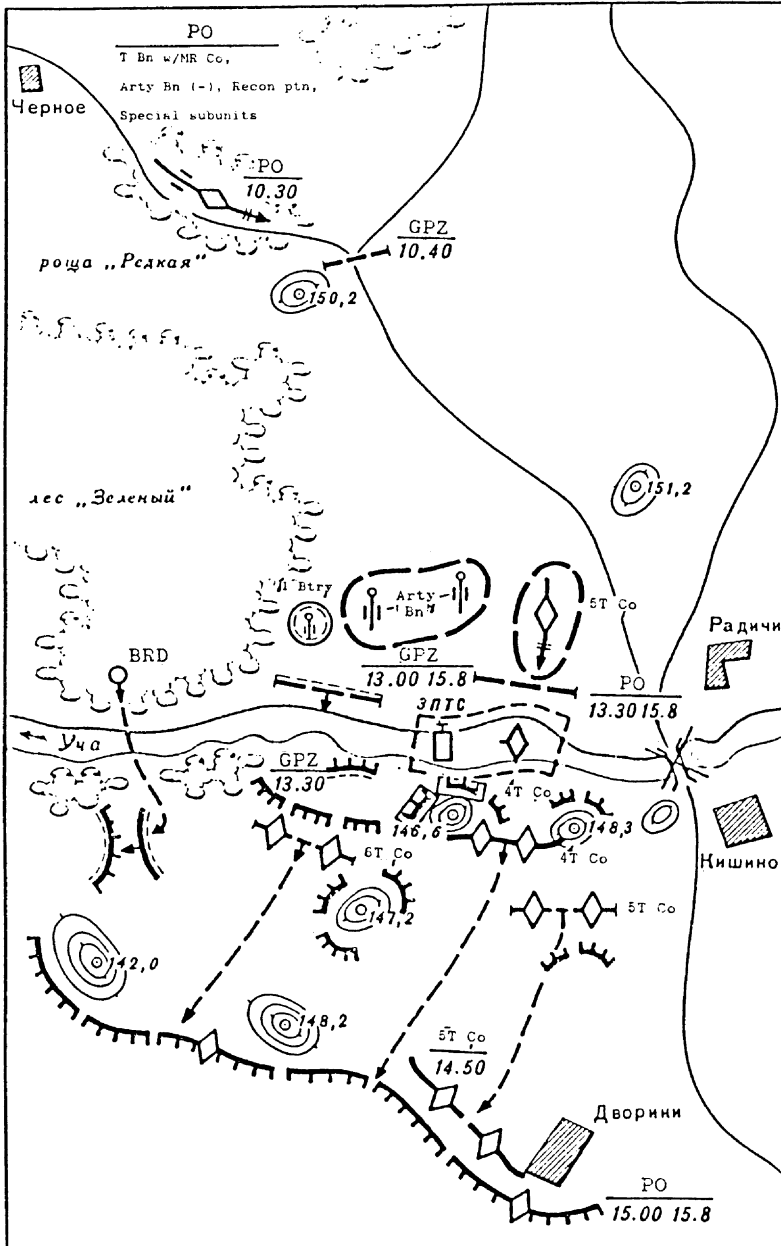
RIVER CROSSING OPERATIONS

A major facet of forward detachment operations during the pursuit phase of an offensive is the overcoming of major obstacles, the most important of which are rivers.⁹ The Soviets have had vast experience in dealing with river crossings and have learned from those experiences how useful forward detachments can be in crossing those obstacles.

Water obstacles encountered during an offensive can be crossed from the march or, if defended strongly by the enemy, can be crossed in a planned operation. Whenever possible, during pursuit attacking forces should strive to seize a crossing from the march, for that generates surprise, saves time, and preserves the high tempo of the pursuit. Late in the operation, however, when forces are fatigued and the enemy has marshalled larger reserves, a prepared river crossing may be necessary. In both cases, forward detachments can play a role. Forward detachments without much support can carry out a hasty crossing and either gain the initial foothold or participate in the first echelon of the prepared crossing. The use of new types of weaponry and the potential use of nuclear weapons affects the nature of operations in general, and river crossing in particular. First, they increase the tempo and depth of the offensive which, in turn, necessitates more frequent hasty crossings. The threat posed by new weapons to bridgeheads and forces in them requires that river crossings be conducted of necessity by surprise over wider sectors; and forces, after the crossing, have to create bridgeheads of considerably greater depth than in the past.

Forward detachments, leading the relentless pursuit, initiate all river crossing virtually on the shoulders of the enemy (Figure 10). When crossing operations are envisioned, the forward detachment must be

OFFENSIVE USE



10. Forward detachment commander's plan to secure a river crossing

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

large enough to carry it out. Experience has indicated this requires reinforced, amphibious, motorized rifle battalions equipped with sufficient attached engineer and other specialized equipment to carry out the crossing. Tactical air assault forces often cooperate with the forward detachment by seizing objectives on the far bank of the river. The necessity of securing a crossing on a broad front requires use of multiple strong forward detachments, all cooperating with one another. Tank battalions follow the forward detachments to provide direct fire support for its hasty crossing and cover the flanks of the assaulting units. Thereafter, the tank battalions supporting the forward detachment negotiate the river and help develop the offensive on the far bank.

The success of even a hasty river crossing operation depends on careful preparations and the skill of subunits carrying it out. Most planning is conducted while the detachment is on the march. Initially, the forward detachment commander is given a general mission, an axis of advance, instructions regarding crossing sectors and sites, and missions to be fulfilled on the far bank. The commander then details the mission, issues preliminary orders for operational preparations, evaluates the situation, and makes his decision.

In assessing the situation, the commander closely studies the water obstacle, hydrographic conditions, aerial photographs, reconnaissance reports, and all pertinent intelligence information. His decision relates to general questions, methods used to destroy enemy on the approaches to the river and on the opposite bank, location of main and secondary crossing sites, distribution of crossing equipment, movement routes and orders, equipment preparation for the assault, and the crossing sequence of subunits. In addition, he organizes cooperation between the forward detachment, reinforcing units, and tactical air assault forces, if employed.

With planning completed, the forward detachment advances rapidly toward the river, while attempting to avoid contact with enemy units, and seizes existing bridges, crossing sites, or sectors suitable for crossing. Supported by air and artillery strikes, the detachment then crosses the river on bridges or using amphibious vehicles and other crossing means. If a tactical air assault has been conducted, it links up with the forward detachment; and together they consolidate their positions and expand the bridgehead to requisite size.

The forward detachment approaches the river along two routes and dispatches a combat reconnaissance patrol to check potential natural or manmade crossing sites. In addition, reconnaissance subunits of higher headquarters, which already operate in front of the forward

OFFENSIVE USE

detachment, send similar reports. Since forward detachments are likely to maintain visual contact with withdrawing enemy forces, additional reconnaissance patrols check on the progress of the withdrawal.

The forward detachment approaches the water obstacle in a column formation suited to hasten forward movement, repulse surprise enemy strikes, and conduct the actual crossing. Tanks and self-propelled artillery subunits lead and motorized rifle subunits and crossing equipment follow. March security forces (advance, flank, and rear parties) protect the detachment's advance. With preparations complete, the detachment then conducts the crossing and secures the required bridgehead.

If enemy units block the advance, the forward detachment will attempt to bypass them. If that fails, it will have to deploy into combat formation, destroy the enemy, and then conduct the crossing.

Fire support for the hasty crossing is provided by artillery, helicopters, and fixed wing aircraft which strike, in priority, enemy nuclear systems, artillery, strong points, reserves, and command posts. Support is continuous throughout the entire operation. During the attack subunits will attempt to seize manmade crossing sites intact to speed up the advance and release valuable pontoon bridge assets for other sectors.

If the combat reconnaissance patrol detects no defending force at the river line, it and follow-on forward detachment subunits will immediately cross the obstacle and consolidate positions on the far bank. Experience has demonstrated this is best done at night or during a surprise, rapid approach to the obstacle. If this is done, no artillery preparation is employed; and all attempts are made to avoid destruction of existing crossing sites.

In a contested crossing, after a short but intense artillery and air preparation, tanks, self-propelled artillery, and forward detachment tube artillery use direct fire to suppress the defending enemy and his fire support. Under cover of this fire, lead amphibious weapons, BMPs, and tanks assault across the river in several sectors. Those which have crossed first will use flank and rear attacks to assist other crossing units. The forward detachment main body continues the assault in several sectors to prevent the enemy from concentrating against any single point.

The sequence of assault crossing from the march first involves commitment of security subunits (advance party) and then main detachment units. Each element assaults in its turn after an appropriate fire support preparation. Motorized rifle units on BMPs cross first

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

under cover of a smoke or aerosol screen. Tank subunits follow, using bridges/fords or an assault crossing. Artillery then crosses on assault crossing assets followed by remaining forward detachment reinforcements.

Engineer subunits are integrated into the entire force. Those which cross with forward subunits immediately clear mines, prepare landing sites, and build obstacles for consolidation of positions within the bridgehead. Artillery is committed to the crossing in echelon. Antitank and ATGM subunits cross first followed by antiaircraft and artillery subunits. Artillery remaining on the departure bank continues to support assaulting units.

During the assault, the forward detachment commander retains a reserve to employ in the most successful crossing sector. The reserve, when committed to battle, reinforces the success of the first echelon, repulses enemy counterattacks or remains in reserve. Air defense units erect air defense screens on both sides of the river. Meanwhile, the forward detachment crosses the river behind the detachment's first echelon.

Success in crossing a water obstacle depends upon speed and the ability of a commander to employ effectively his wide array of amphibious equipment. Ideally, a motorized rifle subunit on BMPs requires only 10 minutes to cross a 200 meter wide river. Artillery and other reinforcing equipment can assault cross at a similar rate. This means that a forward detachment's main force can cross an average width river in half an hour.

Self-propelled artillery and tanks cross more slowly, each requiring 15–20 minutes to cross on a tracked self-propelled ferry. Thus tanks cross sequentially on ferries or on bridges once erected. Quantities of bridging equipment in a forward detachment depend directly on the strength and composition of the detachment, especially the quantity of tanks and self-propelled artillery.

Experience has shown that it takes roughly an hour to an hour and a half to secure a bridgehead of sufficient size to erect bridge crossing sites. Erection of a bridge requires an additional hour and a half. Thus a forward detachment should reach the water obstacle two to three hours before the main force in order to seize the bridgehead and erect a bridge before the main force arrives.

Engineer bridging subunits are not included in forward detachments because their presence would make the detachment too unwieldy and reduce the rate of advance. Nor do they travel independently because they lack protection. Hence, they march 40–60 minutes behind the forward detachment. During this period the detachment conducts its

OFFENSIVE USE

assault crossing and secures the bridgehead. If engineer bridging cannot march behind the forward detachment, it moves with the advance guard of the main force.

If nuclear or conventional fire halts the advance of the main force before it reaches the water obstacle, other forward detachments or air assault subunits can assist the forward detachment. If this is impossible, the forward detachment will have to defend against counterattacks of increasing intensity. This is a prime consideration in determining the initial composition and strength of the detachment.

Since forward detachments seize and hold numerous bridgeheads of limited size, the main force must develop the offensive quickly to ensure the viability of the bridgeheads. Otherwise, the enemy will concentrate his forces, seal off the bridgehead, and create conditions requiring conduct of a major penetration operation. This means that prior to the arrival of main forces, forward detachments will have to expand the bridgehead and incorporate into the bridgehead additional crossing sites.

COOPERATION WITH TACTICAL AIR ASSAULTS

Recent advances in weaponry, aircraft, and helicopters, the fragmented nature of the contemporary battlefield, and the importance of time in operations have increased the feasibility and utility of tactical air assaults. Tactical air assaults have become the vertical dimension of ground tactical maneuver and a necessary adjunct to the ground function.¹⁰

Tactical air assaults, like forward detachments, operate to maintain the high tempo of the offensive and to develop the offensive both through the tactical and into the operational depths of the defense. In particular, tactical air assaults are an important means of overcoming major obstacles and for dealing with a variety of special conditions.

The nature of contemporary combat dictates the joint missions which forward detachments and air assault forces can perform. Since offensive success depends directly on a force's ability to use tactical maneuver to split up an enemy force, tactical maneuver forces (primarily forward detachments and air assaults) perform missions to effect that splitting-up process. This includes seizing and holding key objectives in the enemy defense, pinning down enemy maneuver forces, securing passage over or through major terrain obstacles, and striking enemy reserves or withdrawing units to pre-empt re-establishment of coherent defenses.

In circumstances of nuclear conflict, tactical air assaults perform the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

principal task of destroying enemy nuclear weapons. They accomplish this task automatically, without specific guidance, within the context of performing their assigned mission.

During the course of the offensive, the forward detachment and air assault force will operate jointly to secure objectives within the depths of the enemy defense. Seizure of the objective is designed to pre-empt or defeat establishment of enemy defenses throughout the depths.

The air assault force is assigned forces and support of all kinds sufficient to fulfill its mission. The assault force normally consists of motorized rifle subunits from the second echelon or reserve. They are assigned the task of air assault and receive their mission in sufficient time to participate in planning and to coordinate and receive requisite support for the assault.

Coordination is particularly thorough between the forward detachment and air assault force. Jointly they pay special attention to the question of exploiting nuclear or other fire and to methods for coordinating their final assaults on the objective. Of special importance are use of precise mutual recognition signals and the sharing of information over reliable communications.

Close cooperation is also required between the tactical maneuver forces and supporting aviation. Aviation support is often the only support available to deep operating units. It detects, engages, and destroys enemy forces impeding the advance and provides fire support during assaults on the objective.

After receiving its mission, the tactical air assault force flies to the assault landing area. Its advanced group seizes the landing area and supports subsequent landings by the assault subunits. When landing is complete, the assault force commander sends out combat reconnaissance patrols, issues orders to his subunits, organizes cooperation, and begins movement to his objective. Assault subunits move toward their objectives rapidly and in pre-combat formation, preceded by reconnaissance patrols and security elements. The force employs *maskirovka* whenever possible to keep its movements secret. Throughout its operation, the force, like the forward detachment, avoids protracted conflict with large enemy forces, bypasses centers of resistance, and destroys small enemy groups.

The air assault force conducts its assault on the objective in coordination with the ground forward detachment. It attacks rapidly from the march and from different directions to encircle, split, and destroy the enemy in detail. If both forces are attacking the same objective, they will subdivide the objective into two distinct portions. In a river crossing operation, air assault subunits will seize a bridgehead on the

OFFENSIVE USE

opposite bank to support the forward detachment's crossing (Figure 11). If the forward detachment has already crossed the river, the air assault force will attack objectives designed to enlarge the bridgehead and develop the subsequent offensive.

Tactical air assaults can perform a similar role of cooperating with forward detachments in attacks to breach other obstacles such as ridges or mountains (Figure 12). In these instances, air assault forces often seize dominating terrain in close proximity to the key terrain feature (pass, defile, etc.). In all instances, the air assault force can also contribute to success of the operation by blocking the movement of enemy reserves into the threatened area.

Methods of joint operations by forward detachments and tactical air assaults depend on their specific combat missions and the situation. If an objective is unoccupied, the two forces can jointly secure it and erect defenses. In some instances, the air assault force can seize an undefended objective independently and establish a defense around it.

If the enemy halts the air assault force short of its objective, the force commander uses his fire support to suppress the defense and then assaults it from the flank or rear, either independently or with the assistance of the forward detachment.

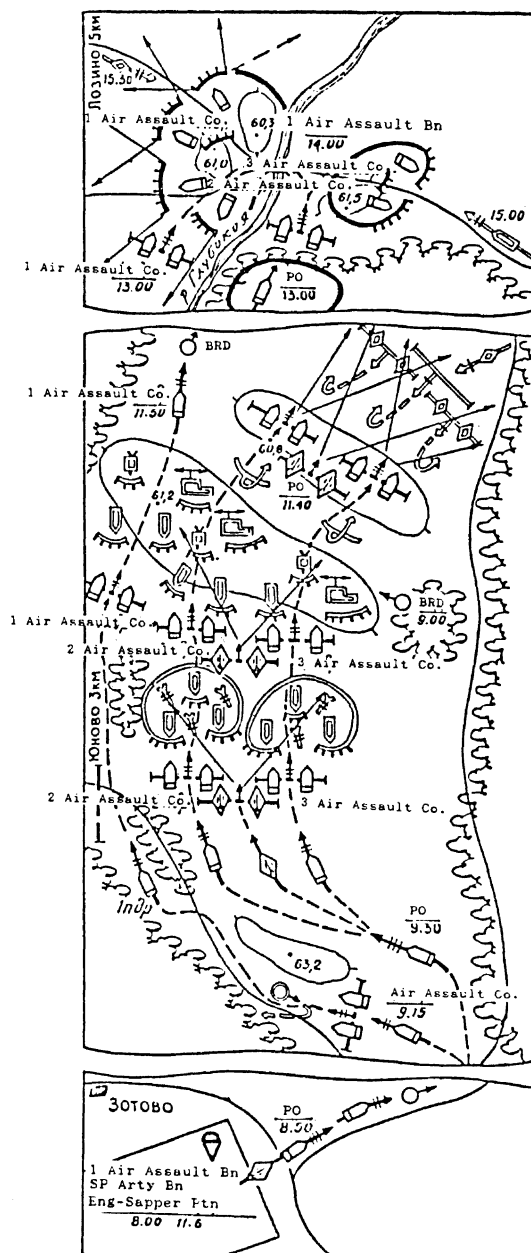
In either case, once on the objective, the air assault defense focuses on antitank measures along the most critical approaches to the position. An air assault defensive position usually consists of distinct company and platoon strong points positioned to intersect main roads and commanding heights and to deny the enemy access to the objective. The force defends until the forward detachment or main force relieves it.

Air assault forces can also land to block the movement of enemy reserves at key locations in the depth of the defense. In this case, after landing, the force fans out to establish ambushes and blocking positions on likely enemy approach routes. Whenever possible, it destroys separate enemy groups and impedes the progress of enemy forces until relieved by the forward detachment or approaching main forces.

When operating in concert with a forward detachment, an air assault force's chances of success, if not its survival, depend on activity [*aktivnost'*], speed, decisiveness, and boldness. It relies as much on its mobility and maneuverability as it does on its fire. A combination of those traits and surprise are necessary to destroy potential enemies before they can erect organized resistance.

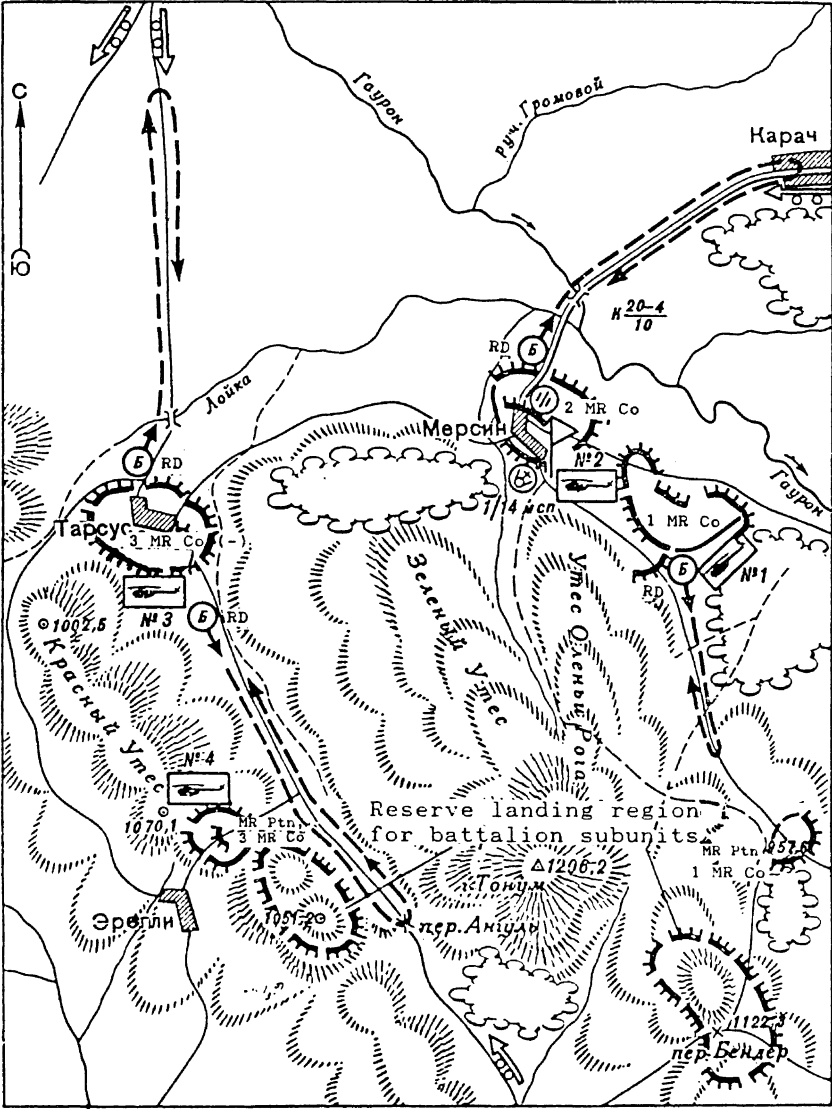
Modern air assault forces, tailored with adequate support, can today function as a forward detachment in their own right to maneuver, seize, and hold objectives until relieved by the main force.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



11. Air assault to secure a river crossing

OFFENSIVE USE



12. Air assault to secure a mountain pass

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

MOUNTAIN OPERATIONS

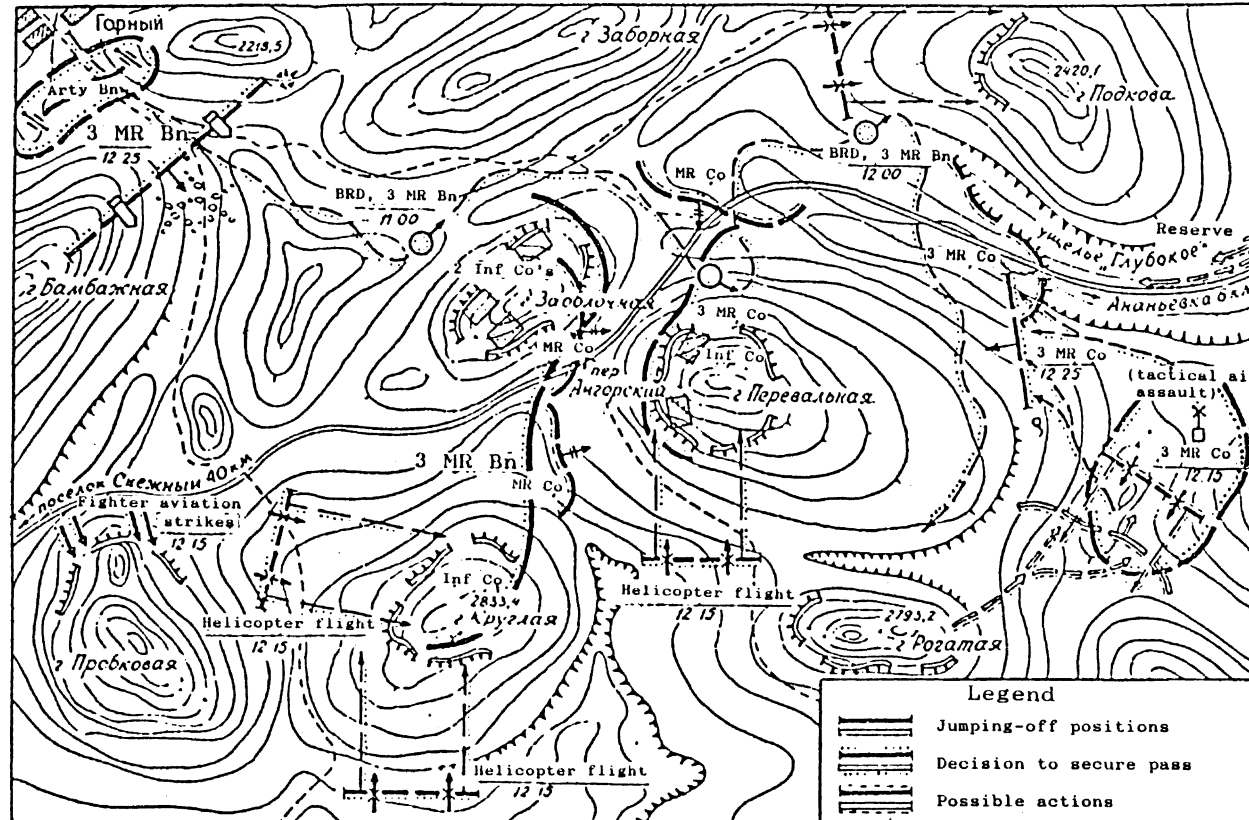
Geographical conditions have a significant effect on the conduct of military operations and shape the way that general principles of military art and concrete operational and tactical techniques are applied. The Soviets recognized these realities in the Second World War and learned them more recently in Afghanistan.¹¹ Soviet military field service regulations have always reflected these realities as well.

Operational and tactical maneuver are especially affected by terrain and climatic factors. This is particularly true of techniques learned and even perfected in open, relatively moderate terrain. Both operational and tactical maneuver forces and techniques were developed, tested, and matured to a large extent in the plains and steppes of southern Russia. Later the Soviets adjusted their forces and techniques to apply in the forested regions of Belorussia. Considerably greater adjustment was required for the techniques to be of use in the Carpathian Mountains and even on the urbanized approaches to Berlin. By war's end the Soviets adjusted to conduct successful maneuver in the varied and difficult terrain of Manchuria, where desert, mountain, forest, and swamp alike tested Soviet ingenuity and boldness.

From their experiences, the Soviets have developed an appreciation of the difficulties of mountain warfare. The broken relief, numerous inaccessible obstacles, varied and constantly changing weather conditions, and restricted road network hinder maneuver, complicate coordination, restrict support, and test command and control. Despite these problems, the Soviets believe tactical maneuver in such conditions is still possible. The role of forward detachments in mountain operations is somewhat analogous to that of detachment operations elsewhere. The detachments, in cooperation with air assaults, penetrate enemy defense, advance into the depths, and secure objectives which facilitate the main force advance, disrupt enemy defenses, and block withdrawal of enemy forces or redeployment of enemy reserves. In the mountains, the range and mobility of the detachment is restricted, objectives are at shallower depths, and the composition of the detachment is lighter. Forward detachments may operate along roads and valleys or may be employed as enveloping detachments to seize critical terrain on the enemy's flank or in his rear.

In the mountains, normally a forward or enveloping detachment is used to seize commanding heights, passes, defiles, tunnels, or other terrain objectives deep in the enemy defense, independently, or sometimes in cooperation with a tactical air assault force (Figure 13).

The detachment exploits concealed approaches and gaps in the



13. Forward detachment operations to secure a mountain pass

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

enemy's combat formation, penetrates into the rear, and seizes the heights adjacent to the pass, tunnel, or gap. Supported by helicopters and an air assault, the detachment then strikes the flanks and rear of the enemy force, destroys it, seizes the objective, and holds it until the arrival of the main force. The detachment can be supported by either nuclear or conventional fire.

Terrain has a major impact on the mission, composition, and manner of operation of the detachment. Objectives are shallower, and the use of tanks and artillery is somewhat limited. When operating along an accessible axis on roads through a valley, the detachment will include tank subunits reinforced with motorized rifle, artillery, and engineer elements. Along a more difficult axis, a reinforced motorized rifle unit is better suited for operations.

The detachment commander specifies the mission, the axis of advance, the line of departure, and the objectives. He also organizes all aspects of cooperation. Detailed evaluation of enemy strength and dispositions, as well as the terrain, must be accomplished within the context of planning the operation to determine which of the limited number of axes of advance the detachment will use and the exact method of maneuver. The commander's evaluation includes accessibility, condition, and capacity of routes; presence and condition of gaps, passes, gulleys, and ravines; likely obstacles and barriers; concealed approaches and dead spaces; ambush sites; and special equipment required.

The commander selects the axis for attack and maneuver and assesses likely locations of enemy strong points along the limited number of routes. The attacking forward detachment is forced by circumstances to use roads and valleys for its main attack. To create favorable conditions, it employs fire to assist the frontal advance and deploys enveloping detachments along less accessible routes (mountain paths and concealed approaches) to maneuver and deliver surprise attacks on the enemy's flank and rear. The coordinated enveloping attacks along the slopes and crests of ridges add breadth and maneuverability to the battle and serve to distract and disrupt the enemy defense.

Timing of frontal and enveloping attacks is critical to the success of the operation as is the speed with which enveloping operations develop. If possible, attacks should be simultaneous and sudden. Hence, detachment subunits are told from what position, along what axis, and when to begin operations. They receive precise missions and are given carefully worked out signals for mutual identification, target identification, and opening and shifting of fire.

OFFENSIVE USE

If possible, forward detachments should seize mountain passes from the march to prevent organized withdrawal of enemy units or to block reserves. When approaching a mountain pass, subunit commanders organize several combat reconnaissance patrols which simultaneously reconnoiter approaches to and defenses in the pass and search out routes around those defenses and concealed approaches to the rear. Most important, they identify commanding heights whose control will dominate the objective.

When reconnaissance has been completed, the forward detachment's subunits move rapidly to secure the commanding heights. Subunits exploit folds in the terrain and move secretly to the enemy flank and rear and seize the heights. From there they sweep down on the pass, secure it, and, with part of the force, develop the offensive into the depths.

If the commanding heights are inaccessible to tanks and motorized infantry, the forward detachment relies on a rapid attack from the front against the pass. After its seizure, the unit fans out to clear the surrounding hills. The direct, frontal assault can succeed only if the detachment is concentrated, and its weapons are able to suppress reliably the bulk of enemy fire from the front and the flanks. Normally, an air assault force cooperates in the task of securing the heights around the pass.

Combat for possession of a mountain gap is also complex. Limited deployment and maneuver space and the presence of obstacles require suppression of enemy fire to the full depth of the gap and conduct of precise coordinated subunit operations.

Under cover of heavy fire, the detachment attempts to seize the mouth of the gap and traverse the gap quickly. It strikes simultaneously along the road running through the gap and along the flanking slopes of the mountain ranges. Detachment subunits boldly and secretly maneuver around the enemy's flanks and into his rear. Rapid seizure of road junctions and bridges in operable condition prevents the enemy from creating obstacles or blowing up bridges or tunnels. Tanks operate in small groups through the gap, and, simultaneously, other tank groups move along the slopes and spurs of the mountain range. Until the forward detachment seizes the exit of the gap, follow-on main forces with their equipment and transport must not enter the mouth of the gap.

After clearing the gap, the forward detachment organizes an all-round defense around the exit and along flanking hills and waits for relief by the main force.

Particularly in mountain operations, the forward detachment must

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

rely on thorough reconnaissance, boldness, and swift operations to achieve successful results.

CONCLUSIONS

Qualitatively new weapons dominate modern offensive combat and create difficult conditions for subunit operations. Forces maneuver rapidly, along separate axes, and are confronted with violent shifts in the situation. Offensive action requires attacking troops to exploit nuclear and massed conventional fire and penetrate rapidly into the depth of the enemy defense to envelop, flank, split, encircle, and destroy enemy forces in detail.

Forward detachments can create favorable conditions for such an advance. In a nuclear environment, their use is even more decisive. Although forward detachments can play a role in the penetration, in particular on the march when nuclear weapons are used or if the defense is weak, its most significant use is during the exploitation and pursuit phase of the operation. Multiple forward detachments, serving operational maneuver and main forces alike, operate in tandem to pre-empt or destroy enemy defenses in the depth by seizing key objectives and blocking or destroying enemy reserves. They overcome a variety of obstacles, impart momentum to the advance, and facilitate the forward movement of main forces. The array of multiple forward detachments serving each level of command, operating at variable depths, acts as the glue which holds the entire offensive force together and gives it cohesion. Their success in conducting tactical maneuver conditions success of operational maneuver forces and the offensive as a whole.

In a less tangible vein, operations by forward detachments, and larger operational maneuver forces, paralyze the command and control system of the enemy by striking at the vital nerve centers in the tactical and operational depths and by severing its communication and logistical networks that sustain the defense. The ultimate impact is to sap the will, if not the capability, of the enemy to resist.

CHAPTER 4

THE MEETING ENGAGEMENT

ROLES AND MISSIONS

The Soviets define the meeting engagement as “a type of offensive battle in which both sides attempt to fulfill assigned offensive missions.”¹ A meeting engagement is possible during a march, on the offense, and on the defense (counterattack). Forces conducting it seek to defeat the enemy rapidly, seize the initiative, and create favorable conditions for subsequent operations. The very nature of modern war contributes to the likelihood and significance of meeting engagements as warring nations seek to avoid the hazards of more deadly linear battle conducted by dense force concentrations deployed in deep patterned arrays.

The factors of time, maneuverability, the struggle to seize the initiative, sharply changing situations, spatial scope, and fluidity are characteristics which shape the course of the meeting engagement. Forward detachments are well suited to operations on such a battlefield. They can conduct rapid maneuver, rapidly seize advantageous positions, forestall enemy nuclear or conventional fire, and flexibly deploy and attack. So also are air assault forces and advance guards which can actively support forward detachments as they conduct tactical maneuver.²

Forward detachments anticipating meeting engagement operate analogously to the way they operate in the depths of an enemy defense after a penetration operation or during the pursuit. They pre-empt enemy seizure of advantageous positions or key terrain to the front, they assist the main body to deploy and join battle on favorable terrain, and they maneuver to strike the enemy on his flanks or rear. In so doing, they help the main force deploy its forces and fire effectively.

In some instances, a forward detachment can be assigned more decisive missions such as attacking an enemy main force in conjunction with the delivery of a nuclear strike. Seldom, however, will nuclear strikes be delivered to assist forward detachment operations. The maneuverability of the forward detachment and its subunits and its

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

frequent changes in position hinder nuclear weapons targeting. Moreover, the relatively limited availability of nuclear weapons makes them more suitable for use against enemy main forces. Therefore, usually the forward detachment will fulfill its mission with only conventional weaponry in support – primarily aircraft, helicopter, main force artillery, and supporting air assault forces.

Forward detachments employ envelopment whenever possible during a meeting engagement. Only when maneuver is impossible will the detachment resort to frontal attack. Then the detachment will use air and artillery strikes and/or concentrated tanks to overcome the defenses.

When the main force approaches the enemy, it deploys against the enemy flank using its battalion closest to the enemy as a new forward detachment. This detachment pins down the enemy and protects the deployment of the main force around the enemy's flank. Meanwhile, the original forward detachment strikes the other flank of the enemy force or is withdrawn into reserve to refit and prepare for a new mission.

It is important to distinguish between the forward detachment and the main force advance guard in a meeting engagement. The forward detachment is a critical combat element necessary to ensure the momentum of the advance. The advance guard, as a security element, prevents surprise attack or penetration of enemy reconnaissance into the main body formation, and destroys enemy march security units. Its presence in no way eliminates the necessity of forming and employing a forward detachment.

ORGANIZATION FOR COMBAT

Since time is the most critical factor in meeting engagements, commanders must make rapid decisions regarding the overall mission, organization of forces, and use of forward detachments. This is especially true for the forward detachment commander. Normally he will make his decision during a developing situation when the intelligence picture is still unclear. He must determine the general composition and posture of the enemy and organize his force, his maneuver plan, and axis and time of operations accordingly.

The forward detachment commander's primary sources of intelligence are his combat reconnaissance patrols, main force reconnaissance forces, neighboring units, and his higher headquarters. The detachment's success depends, in large part, on the timeliness and accuracy of that intelligence.

After analyzing intelligence material, the commander formulates his

THE MEETING ENGAGEMENT

concept, which includes the axis of his main offensive efforts, the type and sequence of maneuvers to destroy the enemy, organization of fire support, his combat formation, and projected use of attached forces.

First, the commander forms and assigns missions to an advance guard or advance party and to his artillery. He designates the route of movement and objectives of the advance element, and the time at which objectives are to be secured, and coordinates measures for commitment of the detachment's main force. He details missions to the artillery in support of the advance guard and main force and designates firing positions, time of firing, signals for commencement, shifting, and termination of artillery fire and displacement procedures.

Finally, the commander assigns missions to his tank and motorized rifle subunits, their attack positions, time and axis of attack, coordination measures, and routes to the objective. Reinforcements receive the same type of instructions.

To save time the commander makes all his decisions and issues all orders during movement. He accomplishes his planning on the map and issues orders and arranges coordination by radio. As new reconnaissance information becomes available, he adjusts missions and refines coordination by radio as well.

A forward detachment in a meeting engagement usually consists of a reinforced tank or, sometimes, a reinforced motorized rifle battalion. Reinforcements for a tank battalion depend on the situation, but normally consist of a motorized rifle company, an artillery battery or battalion, a combat engineer platoon, and other specialized elements. This tailored force enables the detachment to function independently against strong enemy forces and still achieve tank and fire support superiority over the enemy. The reinforced battalion advances to its attack positions in pre-combat formation with a combat reconnaissance patrol and security element (advance party) forward. To ensure as strong an attack as possible, the forward detachment forms its subunits in single echelon with a reserve.

Artillery attachments to the forward detachment enable it to deal effectively with enemy fire support outside the range of tank direct fire. The motorized rifle company assists the detachment in overcoming difficult terrain and the many obstacles it will have to cross. In addition, it covers the detachment from enemy antitank weapons. Air defense attachments help cover the moving forward detachment from enemy aircraft or helicopter strikes.

Attached engineer units help the detachment cross water obstacles it can neither ford nor swim across. Normally, engineer reinforcements include a platoon of tracked self-propelled ferries and two medium

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

amphibious tractor-trailers (carriers) (PTS) if the motorized rifle company crosses the water obstacle on its organic BMPs. An attached combat engineer platoon creates passages through enemy obstacles, blows up bridges, constructs obstacles, and destroys other targets while a chemical reconnaissance squad conducts radiation, chemical, and bacteriological reconnaissance.

The range of operations of the forward detachment is determined by the strength of its composition, its ability to engage strong enemy forces, and the time required to deploy the main force. The structure of the detachment must match requirements to ensure rapid deployment and effective attacks.

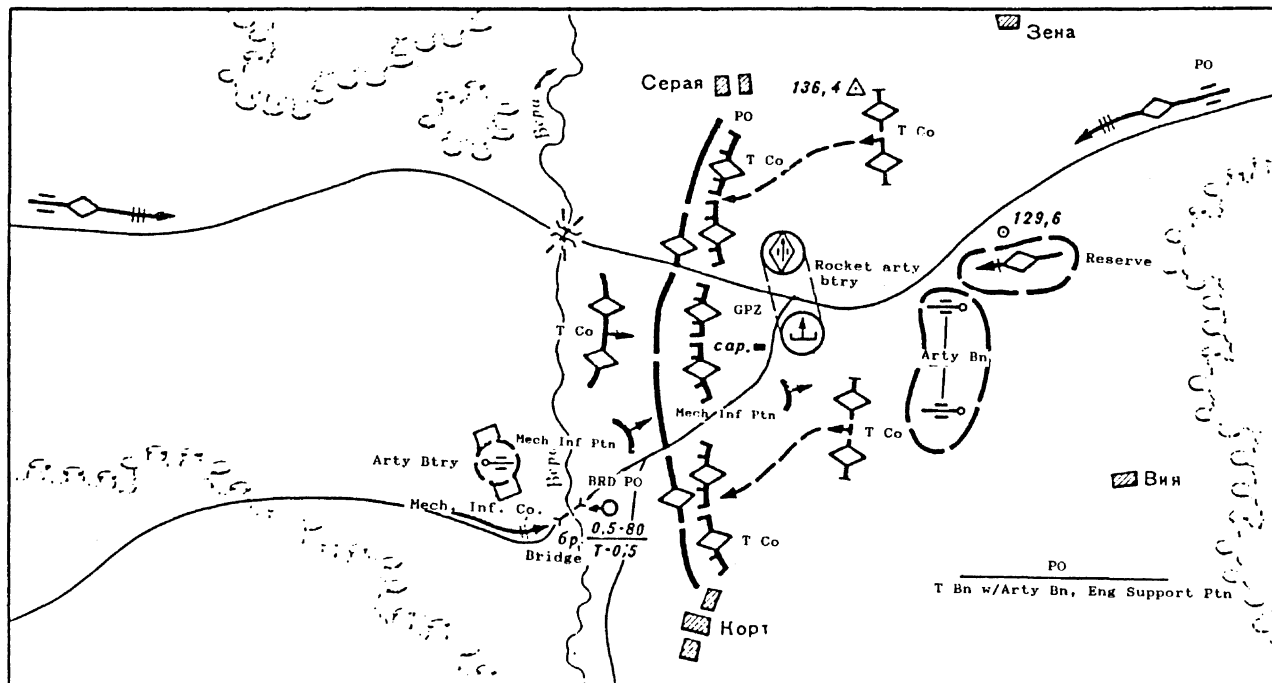
One or two combat reconnaissance patrols of up to platoon strength act as the eyes of the forward detachment and also serve the main forces. Usually a motorized rifle or tank company with a motorized rifle (tank) platoon and a combat engineer squad serve as the advance party and aid in the reconnaissance mission as well. Tank subunits lead the advance of the detachment's main force, followed by motorized rifle subunits. Artillery follows near the head of the column, and air defense weapons are distributed throughout its length.

To protect the entire column from enemy means of mass destruction, the forward detachment advances at maximum possible speed and in dispersed columns. It conducts constant reconnaissance of all types, exploits the protective characteristics of the terrain, and strikes the enemy from the march. Once engaged in combat, it maintains continuous heavy pressure on the enemy to make it difficult for him to employ weapons of mass destruction.

Command and control on the march and in combat must be crisp and effective. All radio signals must be brief and clear. Commanders must display initiative and flexibility, and units must react quickly and effectively to all orders in all circumstances.

COMBAT

The forward detachment initiates the meeting engagement rapidly and decisively to forestall enemy seizure of advantageous positions (Figure 14).³ The enemy will also attempt to seize the initiative by advancing along several routes using strong covering forces and probably tactical air assaults of his own in company to battalion strength to secure key positions along the movement route. The enemy will also probably employ helicopters and aircraft for reconnaissance, to facilitate command and control, and to create obstacles. Thus, the forward



THE MEETING ENGAGEMENT

14. Forward detachment operations in a meeting engagement (variant)

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

detachment will have to bypass or destroy enemy security forces and deal with innumerable other threats.

The forward detachment engages and destroys enemy security forces along its axis of advance, advances at maximum speed, and uses its advance party, main force artillery, and concealed routes and smoke screens to approach its objective. Near the objective, detachment subunits deploy for combat and assault enemy positions from the march, if possible by flank or rear attacks. Once on the objective, the forward detachment consolidates its position, forms an all-round defense, and awaits relief by the main forces.

If the enemy reaches the objective first and creates a defense, the forward detachment maneuvers, attacks the enemy from the flank, and seizes the objective (Figure 15). If a superior enemy force repulses the attack, the forward detachment occupies defensive positions on nearby defensible terrain and pins down the enemy until assisted by the main force.

The forward detachment conducts its assault with tanks and motorized rifle subunits on BMPs advancing jointly without dismounting. Artillery deploys from the march to support the assault, while air defense weapons position themselves to defend against air strikes. Engineer elements assist in removing obstacles to the assault or prepare passages through or bypasses around obstacles.

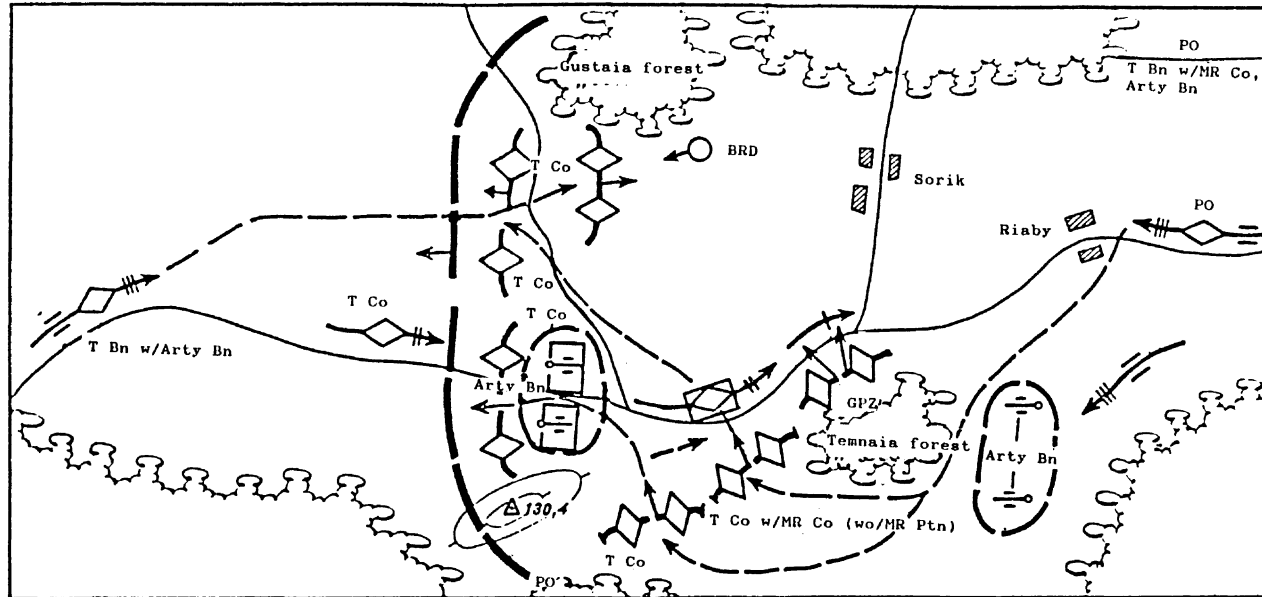
The forward detachment commander uses his reserve to meet unforeseen requirements. In addition, he constantly reconstitutes reserves from subunits which have completed their mission or suffered casualties and require refitting or reconstitution.

After securing its objective, the forward detachment erects defenses around it, camouflages its positions, and secures its flanks. Upon relief by the main force, it receives a new mission.

CONCLUSIONS

The decisiveness, spatial scope, and fluidity of modern meeting engagements require forward detachments to conduct active operations. It requires on the part of the commander and his subunits speedy decision-making, swift movement, and decisive deployment and attacks. The detachment must rely on its superior mobility and maneuverability to accomplish its mission. Only as a last resort should it rely on its sheer combat strength.

In essence, the actions of forward detachments in a meeting engagement are pre-emptive – designed to anticipate and forestall enemy action. In doing so the operation of a single forward detachment



THE MEETING ENGAGEMENT

15. Forward detachment operations in a meeting engagement (variant)

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

keeps the enemy off balance and renders him incapable of organized response. Taken singly, a forward detachment can achieve significant results. Multiple use of forward detachments has an even greater effect on the enemy. In particular, it prevents coherent action and has a paralyzing effect on his command and control.

Multiple forward detachments operating in anticipation of a meeting engagement (as well as deep in an enemy defense) add depth to battle, militate against the development of linear battle, and thoroughly intermesh opposing units. This hinders effective enemy ground response and also makes it difficult for the enemy to respond effectively, if at all, with use of weapons of mass destruction. Operating in such a manner, forward detachments cushion the shock of large forces clashing in meeting battle and permit the attacking force to both disrupt enemy disposition and ensure effective commitment of the mass of one's own force. Effective forward detachment operations seize the initiative and impart momentum to the offensive.

CHAPTER 5

DEFENSIVE USE

ROLES AND MISSIONS

Traditionally, the Soviets have used forward detachments primarily on the offensive, during pursuit and in meeting engagements. Since forward detachments developed within the context of evolving offensive maneuver techniques and were most extensively used during the last three years of war, there are few examples of wartime defensive use. In the post-war years, however, the Soviets have devoted considerable attention to the potential applicability of techniques and forces used in war to the post-war combat environment. As the nature of war has evolved and matured into its present state, so also have concepts for the conduct of tactical maneuver in both offensive and defensive circumstances.

On the contemporary, high intensity, fragmented battlefield where linear warfare no longer predominates, dedicated maneuver forces must play an increasingly important role. Whereas defensive combat formerly focused on well structured defenses consisting of main defensive regions and distinct security zones, today defenses are less contiguous in nature and echeloned in depth. Non-contiguous defenses and greater depth are necessary to absorb the impact of new weaponry and highly maneuverable forces on an offensive, to erode enemy strength, and ultimately to produce enemy exhaustion and defeat.

In this emerging defensive scheme, there is greater need for deployment of actual combat forces, capable of rapid maneuver, in the security areas forward of main defensive sectors and belts. According to the Soviets, "The objective of defensive combat under modern conditions is to break up or repulse an offensive by superior enemy forces, destroy him by nuclear and fire strikes, counterattacks, and the use of obstacles, stubbornly hold areas and positions which intercept probable enemy offensive axes, and create favorable conditions to shift to the offense."¹

Contemporary defensive combat formations must be strong and

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

active. They must be able to engage effectively enemy forces on approaches to the defense and avoid massive damage from enemy nuclear and conventional fire strikes. They must be able to maneuver to meet the requirements of rapidly developing battle, and they must contend successfully with enemy air assaults and air mobile operations. Ultimately, they must be flexible enough to absorb enemy blows while weakening the enemy and preparing for decisive counter-offensive action.

In this defensive scheme, forward detachments are tasked to hold consecutive prepared defense lines in the security zone, wear out the enemy, confuse him regarding the true location of main defensive positions, force him to commit forces along disadvantageous axes, and ultimately, help create conditions for his subsequent destruction.²

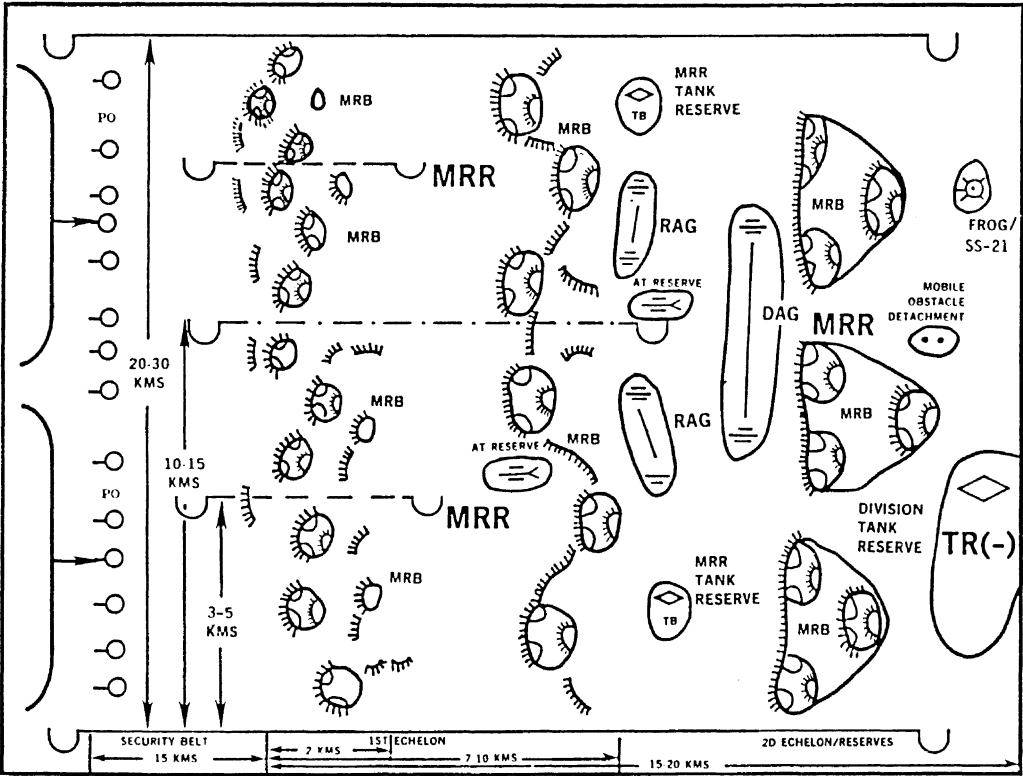
By performing a basic reconnaissance and fixing function, forward detachments pinpoint enemy columns and force them to deploy, making them more susceptible to destruction by nuclear, artillery, or air strikes. In doing so they force the enemy to suspend offensive action, they weaken the force of his offensive blow, or they disrupt his coordination and command and control.

Electronic reconnaissance, visual observation, search operations, and ambushes by forward detachments disclose enemy attack preparations, determine his grouping for combat, and detect the location of his armored groups and nuclear delivery means. These are then struck by long range air or artillery assets of the main defending force.

The security zone of the defense is created by the main force commander during transition to the defense, either in direct contact with the enemy or after disengagement (Figure 16). It is organized on terrain in front of the main defensive position. Throughout its depth, several separate defensive positions are created in advance, or on a hasty basis, reinforced by a system of antitank and antipersonnel obstacles. The elaborateness of defenses depends directly on time available to plan and construct them. The security zone protects forces in the main defensive zone from surprise attack, and it delays the enemy and erodes his strength in order to gain time for erection of more thorough defenses. It also reveals the principal enemy force grouping and the axis along which they intend to operate.

The security zone is constructed to protect the most important axis of advance into the most important main defensive positions. This increases the tactical depth of the defense and reduces the enemy's capability of penetrating key sectors or reaching important populated regions, road junctions, or other key objectives. A security zone warrants the name only if it has sufficient depth, a well prepared system

MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION COMBAT FORMATION—DEFENSE
1987



16. Forward detachment in the defense

DEFENSIVE USE

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

of defensive positions and obstacles, and forces and means necessary for its organization and defense.

The depth of the security zone must be sufficient to allow coordination between the forward detachment and main force, to provide for reliable fire support of the forward detachment by the main force, and to permit extensive maneuvering by the forward detachment. Ultimately, its depth must prevent enemy penetration to the main defensive zone. The width of the security zone and disposition of defensive positions within it must eliminate the possibility of bypass by enemy forces. The zone also intersects principal enemy axes into the defense and provides room for coordinated action by forward detachment subunits.

The forward detachment makes maximum use of advantageous terrain in the zone and uses terrain to weave a web of defensive positions with an extensive obstacle system created by engineer units. Defensive positions are most dense and in greatest depth along the best high speed armored approaches into the zone and in locations where the enemy can mass his fire support means. Secondary axes of approach are less strongly held. Usually reinforced motorized rifle subunits defend along the more vulnerable and most important axis, while lighter forces, covered by engineer obstacles and artillery and mortar fire, defend along secondary axes.

Each defensive position in the security zone is carefully prepared. Withdrawal from one position to another is permitted only on order of the senior commander who created the forward detachment. Coordinated action by multiple defensive subunits and their reconnaissance elements deployed across a broad front permit early identification of main enemy forces and principal attack axes.

Preparation of a security zone is undertaken as early as possible after the decision has been made to defend. Any terrain may be used for a security zone, but it will have a major impact on the composition and disposition of forces designated to defend it. Thus, close study of the terrain and tailoring of defenses to match it is one of the most critical aspects of defensive preparations.

Whenever possible, the security zone defense should fully integrate within it advantageous natural positions and obstacles such as swamps, ravines, and water obstacles. Terrain features will have a major impact on the amount of engineer resources necessary to construct available defense.

A second major factor influencing the nature of the security zone is the strength of enemy forces. Enemy strength determines the necessity for using nuclear weapons, the amount of fire support required, the

DEFENSIVE USE

relative strength of defending motorized rifle and tank forces, and the manner in which these forces are arrayed for combat. The presence and activity of enemy air has a considerable impact on the tempo and amount of engineer work and when it can be done (night or day).

Finally, the nature of the security zone is affected by the availability of time, forces, and materiel assets. If time is available, extensive defensive preparations are possible, especially in an engineer sense. Usually a forward detachment receives as reinforcements one or two combat engineer companies to make its necessary engineer preparations.

The forward detachment prepares several successive positions in the security zone. It erects its first position along a favorable natural line at a distance which permits main force artillery to support the forward detachment by fire from temporary firing positions. The second position is also created along an advantageous line far enough to the rear so that the enemy artillery and mortars will have to displace forward to strike them. In addition, while displacing to the new position, forward detachment subunits must be able to maintain fire coordination, deliver effective fire on the enemy, and cause him continuous casualties. The last position of the security zone, called the forward position, has a special function. It must conceal the true outline of the forward edge of the main defensive zone and confuse the enemy as to its location. Thus, engineer preparations of the last position must be fully developed to resemble a main defensive position.

Forward detachment defenses in all three positions are organized into individual company and platoon strong points to hold advantageous terrain sectors intercepting the most important axes. Gaps between the strong points are covered by fire and obstacles as well as patrols. Engineer obstacles are densest around subunit strong points on the most favorable terrain features.

Engineers assist in the creation of tank and BMP firing positions along the best tank approaches and artillery firing positions throughout the depths. Counterattack positions are selected to the rear along the most important approaches. All firing positions for artillery and mortars, defensive positions, assembly areas, and major routes are carefully camouflaged. Engineers and troops create obstacles on most likely approach routes, in front of defensive positions, and in the gaps between strong points. They leave marked passages for withdrawal of forward detachment subunits to subsequent positions and prepare all important manmade structures (buildings, bridges) for destruction.

Engineer obstacle plans also involve creation of overlapping minefields in areas where natural obstacles are sparse. The minefield

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

(obstacle) system is designed so that the enemy, in bypassing one, will run into another, and his forces will be canalized so thoroughly that his flanks will come under fire by forward detachment guns, tanks, and ATGMs. The obstacle system is designed to inflict the greatest number of losses on the enemy.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DEFENSE

The commander who creates the forward detachment details the missions for defense of the security zone. This normally includes: nature of the enemy; mission of the forward detachment; reinforcements; zone of operations; time of preparation; an outline of positions; an obstacle and engineer preparation plan; missions of neighboring forward detachments and forward reconnaissance units; artillery coordination; combat helicopter and aircraft availability; duration of defense and withdrawal procedure; communications and signal information; organization of all-round support; and political work with personnel.

The forward detachment commander, in turn, makes an estimate, determines his plan, and issues orders to his subordinates on all matters associated with the defense of the security zone. This includes study of the terrain, conduct of reconnaissance, assessment of the enemy's likely actions, and the organization of his tactical subunits and all supporting means. Ultimately, the forward detachment's order stipulates: the main defense axis; deployment positions; the combat formation of subunits; withdrawal routes to each position; engineer support; and temporary fire positions for artillery supporting the forward detachment. If possible, the commander personally observes preparation of all defensive positions. Otherwise, he focuses his attention on the most important sector.

If there is sufficient time, the forward detachment and supporting engineers prepare the first position first and then work back toward the rear. If time is short, priority is accorded to the most threatened sectors. Thus, throughout the process, the commander must know where to concentrate his preparatory efforts and ultimately his forces as well.

The actual composition of the forward detachment is determined by the higher commander based on his assessment of the situation. Usually it will consist of motorized rifle or tank subunits reinforced with one or two artillery battalions, two or three antitank artillery battalions, an air defense missile battery, one or two combat engineer companies, a flamethrower subunit, and reconnaissance elements. In addition, the forward detachment is supported by fire from main force

DEFENSIVE USE

artillery units firing from temporary positions in front of the forward edge of the main defensive zone.

The forward detachment commander adopts a combat formation in accordance with his mission, likely enemy actions, available forces, and the nature of the terrain. Since it must fight on a broad front, the detachment usually forms in a single echelon with a combined arms reserve. It may also include an artillery group, an air defense missile battery, an antitank reserve, and an engineer reserve.

Motorized rifle and tank subunits, reinforced by antitank and artillery weapons, occupy defensive strong points on tactically advantageous terrain. A motorized rifle company defending such a strong point may be reinforced by up to a battery of artillery, up to a mortar battery, a platoon of tanks, an antitank platoon, and up to a platoon of flamethrowers. A tank company will be reinforced by one or two motorized rifle platoons and supporting weapons. Defending companies will use supporting weapons to strengthen their defense and cover their flanks and gaps between the separate strong points by integrated fire.

The forward detachment retains some of its ATGMs in reserve, and it divides its artillery into two functional groups. The first group deploys behind the reserve position on the most vulnerable tank approach. The second group is located to the rear of the position to which the forward detachment is withdrawing. While both groups concentrate their fire in support of forces in the first position, the second group covers any required withdrawal.

The reserves of a forward detachment consist of up to a reinforced company plus the ATGM element and engineers. It is located on an important axis in the depth of the security zone to provide depth to the defense, to destroy penetrating enemy groups, to protect the defensive flanks and rear, and to conduct counterattacks and combat enemy air assaults.

The forward detachment commander organizes thorough reconnaissance by dispatching combat reconnaissance patrols to his front. These patrols detect the enemy's advance, determine enemy strength and direction of movement, locate enemy fire support and nuclear means, and establish communication with main force reconnaissance detachments also operating to the front. All command and observation posts also participate in the reconnaissance effort. The senior commander may also order creation of ambushes on probable enemy approach routes, although this is normally a function of the forward detachment's size.

Coordination between the forward detachment and main forces

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

must be thorough and include such matters as use of helicopters, aircraft and artillery support, and withdrawal procedures. Communications procedures, recognition signals, target designation procedures, and signals for summoning, shifting, or ceasing fire are all essential elements of coordination.

The senior commander is responsible for organizing all command and control measures for both the security and main defensive zones. This includes all wire, radio, and mobile communications means and guarantees unity of purpose among all forces based on a single understanding of enemy actions and intentions. Since the success of all forward detachments depends on the fate of each, and isolated withdrawals may result in the encirclement and destruction of a neighboring forward detachment, only the senior commander can authorize a withdrawal.

The forward detachment commander controls his detachment's battle from a command and observation post within the first defensive position, from which he maintains communication (wire, radio, or mobile messenger) with all organic, attached, or supporting units. Simultaneously, a reserve command and observation post is prepared by the reserve at the next defensive position.

Command and control is especially difficult during a withdrawal from one position to another. During withdrawal, the commander moves with the last withdrawing subunit and occupies the reserve command and observation post. During the move, the deputy commander exercises command and control from the reserve position. Orders to withdraw are passed by radio to affected subunits, and other combat units cover the withdrawals.

The necessity for effective coordination requires personal skill and initiative on the part of all commanders and the effective operations of all subunits.

DEFENSIVE COMBAT

When the enemy attack develops, the forward detachment engages in intense combat along successive lines to sap the offensive power of the attacker. The defense begins on the distant approaches to the security zone when the forward detachment and its supporting fires engage enemy units. Thereafter, battle is constant and involves staunch defense, maneuver, and frequent counterattacks. During battle the forward detachment commander constantly collects intelligence and adjusts his defenses to meet every eventuality.

After distant engagement of enemy forces, first, forward detach-

DEFENSIVE USE

ment reconnaissance patrols and then deployed subunits destroy enemy reconnaissance and security units and force the enemy to deploy and reveal his dispositions. Generally, the detachment will face two to three enemy battalions. Once these have been halted the enemy force will have no choice but to deploy. Deployment of the enemy main force usually takes up to one hour. During this period the detachment and supporting artillery, aircraft, and helicopters strive to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy. This may include nuclear or massed conventional artillery strikes. If such fires are employed, the forward detachment is tasked with fixing the enemy to produce a lucrative target.

Subsequent operations develop in accordance with the senior commander's plan. The forward detachment may be required to engage the enemy main force. If so, he provides maximum artillery and air support. If combat in the security zone is too heavy for the detachment to sustain, it may receive orders to withdraw either between or during enemy attacks. When ordered to withdraw during a lull, the forward detachment commander immediately orders withdrawal under a smoke or aerosol screen.

If the forward detachment is in heavy combat, withdrawal is more complex. First, the forward detachment disengages from combat under the covering fire of designated subunits and supporting artillery. It then moves to the new position in company columns and hastily organizes a new defense. Limited visibility (at night or by the smoke of battle) and use of camouflage enables most of the detachment's units to withdraw simultaneously, covered by fire of tank subunits left in position until ordered to withdraw by the detachment commander.

Disengagement during active combat operations is carried out under cover of artillery and mortar fire and obstacles and sometimes also involves a counterattack by a portion of the reserve force. Such counterattacks can facilitate withdrawal and also confuse the enemy regarding the forward detachment's intentions and the nature of future operations.

Withdrawing companies move into assembly areas and then along routes to new positions. At no time during the withdrawal does the entire forward detachment assemble, thus a thorough understanding of the initial plan is essential. Covering subunits withdraw by bounds from one obstacle to the next across the entire defensive front while frequently organizing ambushes at each position. They attempt to delay the enemy, inflict maximum casualties, and gain time for a successful withdrawal. During this process, the reserve is used in the most threatened sectors to protect critical withdrawal routes.

The forward detachment conducts its defense of subsequent posi-

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

tions in the same manner as its defense of the first position but within the context of the changing situation. At the forward position – the last position in the security zone – the detachment seeks to confuse the enemy regarding the location of the forward edge of the main defensive zone. The detachment strives to force him to deploy fully and carry out an extensive artillery preparation to deplete his ammunition stocks. Then enemy forces will be required to engage the forward detachment short of the real defense zone but under constant fire of the main force.

When defending the forward position, the forward detachment concentrates its force along secondary axes where its depleted forces will be able to withdraw more easily. In addition, the detachment can bring its ATGMs, tank, and antitank fire to bear against the flanks of advancing enemy units.

After the enemy fully deploys to attack the forward defensive position, the forward detachment repulses enemy reconnaissance and security units, engages the enemy main force at maximum range, and then defends in designated sectors in close cooperation with the main force. Eventually the forward detachment withdraws from the security zone into the main defensive zone supported by main force artillery units and by tanks firing from ambush. Forward detachment subunits pass through the forward edge of the main defensive zone through passages in obstacles covered by fire from the depth of the defense.

MOUNTAIN DEFENSE

Severe mountain terrain affects the operations of both attackers and defenders. The broken terrain enables the defender to establish a stable defense with fewer forces and weapons. Defenders can concentrate resources and establish a deeply echeloned defense along accessible axes while economizing forces on more difficult approaches. Security zones are generally centered and anchored on key road junctions, commanding heights or passes.

Forward detachments occupying security zones in mountains secure key objectives, make extensive use of surprise ambushes, and conduct bold counterattacks with small subunits.³ Skillful use of obstacles and small unit actions enable the detachment to conduct a lengthy defense and inflict severe casualties on the enemy.

The forward detachment commander erects his defense after careful study of the terrain. He designates first and subsequent positions, focuses the defense on particular sectors, creates strong points along main axes, organizes complex networks of fire covering all approaches, forms a reserve, and designates withdrawal routes.

DEFENSIVE USE

The defensive structure of a security zone in the mountains has a number of special features. When defending a wide valley, the defense must create strong points both in the valley and along the adjoining ridges and spurs to provide for intensive flanking fire. In a narrow valley, the forward detachment concentrates its forces in company and platoon strong points on the commanding heights and along sloping ridges on both flanks of the valley. Only small subunits with machine guns and ATGMs are located directly in the valley.

When defending a ravine the detachment consolidates its forces on the hills adjacent to the ravine entrance. Each hill becomes a well fortified strong point with a many-tiered system of fire. The narrowness of the front also requires deep echelonment of defending forces, and the defenders' flanks must be firmly anchored on totally inaccessible terrain. Small subunits with antitank weapons operate from ambush positions to defend the ravine proper. In essence, the ravine becomes a deadly fire-sac covered by intersecting fire.

Generally the forward detachment deploys combat reconnaissance and security units to its front. These forces and the detachment itself make extensive use of terrain to form surprise ambushes.

A forward detachment defending a security zone in the mountains usually consists of a motorized rifle battalion reinforced by high angle fire systems (mortars and howitzers), engineers, and other support required by the situation. It structures its defense in a single echelon configuration of company and platoon strong points with a reserve. Subunit dispositions on the ground are, however, varied to match the terrain and requirements of the defense.

In a narrow valley, one company is deployed in depth to create a fire-sac. When defending a ridge or hills with an open flank, one company may be echeloned forward or to the rear. In defending a wide valley, all companies can be deployed on a single line. In all cases, however, company strong points must be positioned to intersect the main enemy approach axes to facilitate flanking and intersecting fire. Antitank weapons and obstacles are concentrated on tank approaches and individual guns, tanks, and ATGMs are placed on adjacent hills.

The forward detachment's security subunits (advance parties) initiate the defense under cover of long range fire to force the enemy to deploy and inflict maximum casualties on him. Security elements then withdraw to the flanks of defending subunits to direct the pursuing enemy into a fire-sac or to subject him to flanking fire. Special attention is paid to enemy attempts to bypass difficult terrain sectors or to envelop the open flanks of defending subunits. Concentrated fire and reserve force operations maneuver to prevent this occurring.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

If the enemy bypasses a strong point, it must conduct a stiff all around defense in encirclement to assist its parent force. Experience demonstrates that encirclement battles for key road junctions, passes, and commanding heights in the enemy's rear sharply reduce the strength of an enemy attack and contribute to the failure of his offensive.

During a withdrawal from position to position, a forward detachment can force the enemy to concentrate his forces or occupy unfavorable positions. Subsequent nuclear or massed artillery strikes can inflict immense damage on him and reduce his offensive power before he reaches main force positions.

Only the senior commander can authorize the forward detachment to withdraw. He covers the withdrawal with air and artillery strikes by the main force and by smoke screens and obstacles. While withdrawing, the detachment delays the enemy by blowing up bridges, creating rock barriers and minefields, and by destroying sections of roads.

As is the case in a normal security zone, a forward position may be employed in front of the real main defensive zones. If this is so, the forward detachment defends that position with the same intensity as in normal circumstances. If no forward position is employed, the forward detachment conducts a delaying operation back to the main defensive zone along with main force security elements (advance guard or parties) supported by artillery and mortars firing from reserve firing positions. Upon passage into the main defense zone, main force units take over principal defensive functions.

CONCLUSIONS

The power of modern military forces and the destructiveness of their weapons has had a considerable impact on the nature of defensive combat. Only deeply echeloned defenses linked by carefully integrated engineer obstacles and covered by a skillful network of interlocking fires can sap the offensive strength of advancing enemy forces and condition their ultimate defeat. Just as improved elaborate defenses spelled doom for blitzkrieg in July 1943, today only more mature defenses can absorb the offensive blows of large forces equipped with modern weapons.

Defenses must combine carefully prepared defenses organized in depth with maneuverability, for only through maneuver can forces ultimately escape the crushing weight of available fire. Mobile units equipped with tanks, BMPs, and mobile antitank means must be

DEFENSIVE USE

integrated throughout the defense to take advantage of damage done to the enemy by the network of defensive positions and obstacles.

Maximum damage must be inflicted upon the enemy as he approaches the defense to erode his strength in preparation for the climactic defensive battle. Forward detachments operating in the security zone perform this important function. Heavy "covering forces" deployed in linear fashion are susceptible to rapid destruction by enemy fire and penetration by enemy mobile units. Once penetrated, they can be encircled and destroyed; and their loss hinders the overall success of the defense.

Mobile forward detachments, tailored for the security battle with adequate means to carry out flexible combat from multiple positions organized in depth, can both inflict requisite damage on advancing enemy units and serve the main defensive force by canalizing the enemy blows and forewarning the defenders. Since they are only a small portion of the overall force, their use economizes forces committed to the security zone. Even if they are lost in heavy combat, they will exact a heavy toll on the enemy without depriving the main force of a significant element of its strength. Since their supporting artillery is positioned out of range of the advancing enemy, it will also remain intact for the main defensive battle.

The use of forward detachments in the security zone of the modern defense satisfies the modern requirement for deploying combat forces well forward of the main defense to exact a price on the enemy, a price which traditional reconnaissance and security units cannot pay in modern war.

CHAPTER 6

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT THROUGH 1945

GENESIS

Soviet use of the term “forward detachment” [*peredovoi otriad*] has its linguistic and functional antecedents in the Russian imperial military tradition. During the nineteenth century the Russians used the term detachment “to describe a composite formation – often structured as a combined arms force – assigned a specific mission.”¹ Included under this rubric were such elements as a *corps volant* [*korvolan*], a flying corps [*letuchii korpus*], an advance guard [*avangard*], a flying detachment [*letuchii otriad*], a forward detachment [*peredovoi otriad*], an independent corps, or a raiding force.

These elements generally described three types of forces.² The first, in the Russian cavalry tradition, was a raiding force detailed to perform a variety of raiding missions within the context of an offensive. The second type force was the large detachment dispatched to precede the advance of a larger force. For example, General I. V. Gurko’s force which led the Russian advance through Bulgaria to the Shipka Pass in 1877, during the Russo-Turkish War, was termed a forward detachment. The third and final element was the more conventional security force associated with main force operations, usually called an advance guard.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, detachments of varying types performed either independent missions or security missions. Field service regulations made scant reference to independent detachments, for they were normally *ad hoc* groups to which the regulations applied as a whole. On the other hand, advance guards represented an accepted entity whose function of providing security was well defined by virtually all regulations.³

In the case of the advance guard, there was always the nagging question as to how much of its mission should be security in nature and how much should involve deliberate engagement in combat. This distinction was moot in the case of infantry forces, for their mobility,

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

fire power, and limited range of operations ruled out serious consideration of successful independent combat by such a force deployed in advance of a larger force. Circumstances dictated that they remain close to their parent unit and that they perform the role of advance warning and protection for deployment into action of the main force – a clear security mission.

When a large force preceded its march with cavalry, however, the distinction blurred, for cavalry was capable of operating at greater ranges and of performing a wider range of missions. There was no question that cavalry could perform a security function (and reconnaissance as well). In addition, cavalry could, and often did, engage in raids of various scales. Raiding had clear antecedents in Russian and foreign military experience (US Civil War), and it certainly appealed to those who harbored the “cavalry temperament.” Cavalry could also engage in limited combat with similar enemy units and even infantry forces if they lacked sufficient supporting fire.

It was probably a combination of two factors that gave rise to the creation of modern forward detachments – first, Russian Civil War experiences and second, prospects in the 1920s for motorization and mechanization of the armed forces. Combat during the Civil War differed sharply from operations on the two major fronts of the First World War. Paucity of forces, the great expanse of territory across which fighting occurred, and the relatively low densities of modern weaponry gave rise to fluid and mobile operations. In time, large cavalry forces (corps and later armies) conducted raids and large-scale operations which had considerable impact on the outcome of operations. These cavalry operations and their consequences reinforced existing thought on the utility of long range use of cavalry and influenced post-war military theorists who were searching for military techniques that promised to provide an escape from positional warfare dominant in the First World War and postulated in post-war regulations of most military powers.

The same theorists also believed motorization and mechanization would provide a means to solve their dilemma. By incorporating the automobile, the truck, and the tank into contemporary warfare, they thought it would be possible to negate the effects of the crushing weight of firepower and restore a modicum of maneuverability to combat. During the 1920s, Soviet military theorists redefined the nature of contemporary operations by discarding the old framework for studying and conducting war and by establishing a new framework to replace it. In short, the Soviets articulated three levels of warfare (strategic, operational, and tactical) to replace the older strategic and tactical

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

levels.⁴ They concluded that the increased complexity of war prevented the achievement of strategic goals by only tactical means. Now an intermediate level (operational) was required in the progression from tactical to strategic success. Further, they postulated that strategic success could be achieved only by conducting successive operations, each of which, in turn, depended upon the outcome of tactical combat.

If failure to conduct significant maneuver at the tactical level had been a root cause of the inability of First World War armies to achieve strategic success, then the principal criterion for achieving success at the new operational level of war was the ability to conduct operational maneuver. Here prospective motorization and mechanization could play a significant role. Traditional mobile maneuver forces, personified by cavalry, were clearly incapable of performing large scale maneuver in light of the destructive firepower of modern weaponry. However, motorized and mechanized forces with a large integrated tank complement could maneuver and survive in modern combat.

New maneuver concepts evolved in tandem with industrialization programs designed to produce the equipment necessary to conduct maneuver. By 1929 the Soviets had articulated a concept of "deep battle" [*glubokii boi*], a tactical concept involving the use of motorized and mechanized formations and tanks to penetrate the entire depth of tactical defenses. This concept ultimately expanded into one for "deep operations" [*glubokaia operatsiia*] which the Soviets enunciated in their 1936 *Field Service Regulations*. Deep operations envisioned simultaneous use of tank, mechanized, air, and air assault forces to strike and penetrate through the tactical defenses and well into the enemy's operational depths. Although tempered by the negative effects of combat experiences in the Spanish Civil War and the late 1930s purges of the Soviet officer corps, the concepts of deep battle and deep operations remained a legacy which Soviet military theorists would develop further in the Second World War.

The ability to conduct maneuver successfully was the obvious key to implementation of both deep battle and deep operations. As the motorization and mechanization program progressed, the Soviets began designating forces to perform maneuver functions. At the critical operational level, the Soviets advanced the concept of the mobile group [*podvizhnaiia grupp*], which they defined as "an element of the operational formation of *fronts* (armies), designated for the development of success in offensive operations."⁵ The mobile group, which by the mid-1930s consisted of newly formed mechanized corps, was designed to produce operational success as a critical link

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

between tactical combat and the ultimate achievement of strategic aims.

It was clear, however, that successful operational maneuver depended directly on success at the tactical level, specifically on successful conduct of tactical maneuver. Satisfying tactical requirements had two facets. First, tactical forces had to penetrate tactical defenses before a mobile group could be committed to combat. This, in itself, implied maneuver of tactical forces and fire to accomplish their mission without undue losses so that the operational maneuver forces could be committed to combat and main forces could exploit the mobile group's success. Second, operational maneuver forces depended on skillful operations by their lead elements, to avoid becoming bogged down in the remnants of the tactical defense and to perform deep exploitation in the operational depths. This required lead elements which could maneuver tactically to avoid or overcome enemy forces or obstacles in the operational depths of the defense, specifically lead elements which could fight. Existing reconnaissance or security forces were unsuited to conduct both their required functions and combat as well. Soviet recognition of the necessity of fielding tactical maneuver forces which could fight provided the basis for the development of modern forward detachments.

TOWARD DEEP BATTLE – THE 1920s

The modern concept of the forward detachment evolved in consonance with growing Soviet appreciation for the utility of tactical and operational maneuver. Throughout the 1920s the Soviets analyzed past military experiences to determine suitable combinations of forces with which to lead offensive operations. Their desire was to replicate, so far as possible, the type and effects of maneuver employed in the Civil War when, in some instances, cavalry, armored car units, and even armored trains operating with infantry had served as forward detachments. Despite their attempt to separate the reconnaissance, security, and combat functions, Soviet publications tended to blur the distinction between reconnaissance elements, the advance guard, and the forward detachment.

A 1926 work on the employment of cavalry described the use of cavalry as part of the mixed forward detachment and exemplified the emerging forward detachment function. While treating such a unit as a screening force, it stated:

The reconnaissance work of troop cavalry, even at a distance of

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

one day's march from its infantry, in the event of contact with enemy forward units, very often requires, in the interests of reconnaissance, a firm consolidation of achieved results by holding positions or separate features. Weak in numbers, main force cavalry can hardly fulfill that mission independently. In order to create firmer protection, large force formations, like corps and rifle divisions, in similar situations will bring forward mixed forward detachments.⁶

These mixed forward detachments, deployed in advance of corps or armies, consisted of a mixture of mobile forces including troop cavalry, infantry on vehicles or carts, bicyclists, etc. Their size and composition depended on their mission, which normally involved blocking the advance of the enemy along multiple routes. In addition to performing a reconnaissance function, these units performed a distinct combat function as well. They operated in front of the advance guard during a march to combat.

With the formulation of the concept of deep battle, the form and function of the forward detachment became better defined, at first within the context of a march to contact or meeting engagement. The 1929 *Field Service Regulation (USTAV)* incorporated ideas surfaced throughout the 1920s and expanded the role of the forward detachment. The regulation defined the function of specialized units stating:

Temporary tactical formations (advance guard, rear guard, and so forth) are formed from units of different arms of service for the performance of auxiliary tactical assignments ... [They] are commanded either by the commander of the military formation [division, corps] or the commander of the infantry (cavalry) unit.⁷

This clearly included the forward detachment, which the regulation proceeded to mention by name in subsequent sections.

When describing the conduct of the meeting engagement, the regulation stated, "In certain situations, forward detachments may determine the strength of the enemy advance guard and win a certain amount of time for necessary regrouping ..."⁸ In addition, forward detachments made up of different arms of services with infantry in motor vehicles or wagons and strategic cavalry units could forestall enemy seizure of key positions.

The forward detachments are constituted with the attachment of fire means (machine gun units, for example) which afford an opportunity to hold the said areas (positions) until the approach of the advance guard. The forward detachments occupy the said

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

areas with the hope of hitting the enemy with long-distance fire, for which it is necessary to attach to them regimental artillery, albeit in individual guns. If the enemy has anticipated and occupied the said positions with security units, the forward detachment dislodges these security units. The forward detachments operate entirely independently, outside of combat liaison with the advance guard.

When engaged in combat, the forward detachment is obliged to ascertain the strength, composition, and direction of movement of the enemy's main force.⁹

The forward detachment was initially a distinct subunit of the advance guard. A divisional advance guard in regimental strength would send out a forward detachment consisting of a reinforced company or a battalion. Smaller advance guards employed a reinforced company or platoon. On the march these forward detachments, composed of cavalry, infantry, artillery, and armor, were sent out to secure positions or points whose seizure would forestall enemy action and facilitate the advance of the main force. Forward detachments consisting of only infantry were ordered to send cavalry subunits out to conduct reconnaissance.

This clear definition of function distinguished the forward detachment from the advance guard and accorded it a distinct combat role – a role which would continue to characterize the forward detachment in the future. The regulation, however, recognized the necessity for coordinating forward detachment and advance guard operations by placing the forward detachment in subordination to the advance guard when they were operating in the same general region. It tasked the advance guard commander with providing support for the forward detachment, if needed, to include joint attacks against the enemy's flank.

The 1929 regulation broke new ground when it specified a role for the forward detachment when approaching enemy defenses. It described the initial attack on the enemy defense:

The enemy's security zone is wiped out by the reconnaissance and forward detachments and the advance guard and forward battalions supported by the artillery of the main forces (and, if such exist, armored forces), which is detailed if the reconnaissance and forward detachments and advance guard have not been able to wipe out the security and break through to the forward edge of the defense zone.¹⁰

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

In this configuration the advancing division usually employed one forward detachment at considerable depth and two forward battalions at lesser depths.

During retrograde operations the regulations stipulated use of a forward detachment ahead, along withdrawal routes to clear the routes and maintain the pace of movement. The forward detachment was specifically tasked to remove obstacles on the withdrawal routes and repulse attacks by enemy enveloping parties.

The 1929 regulation represented a quantum leap forward in its definition of the composition and combat function of the forward detachment. The major restriction on its use remained the technological state of weaponry. While the detachment lacked a significant motorized, mechanized, or tank component, its ranges of operations and variety of combat functions would remain restricted; and it would have to operate within close supporting range of the advance guard. The Soviets, however, were clearly anticipating major changes in weaponry which would significantly alter the scale of the forward detachment's role.

TOWARD DEEP OPERATIONS – 1929–1936

As the Five-Year Plans unfolded and the Soviets began to improve the sophistication of their weapons arsenal, major changes occurred in military art and the Soviet force structure. During the first stage (to 1933) the Soviets harnessed initial production of tanks and formation of tank units to the new tactical concepts of deep battle. Then, during the second phase (1933–36), they created a wide array of mechanized and tank forces and articulated the concept of deep operations which envisioned their use in both operational and tactical combat. Throughout this period of burgeoning military thought, the forward detachment's role increased apace. In fact, for a brief period after 1936, its function virtually merged with that of the more important mobile groups.

Soviet military writings emphasized the increasingly sophisticated role accorded to tank-heavy forward detachments up to publication of the new 1936 regulations which captured the essence of deep operations. A September 1932 article in *Krasnaia Zvezda* [Red Star] described the employment of tanks by a rifle division in the conduct of a meeting engagement.¹¹ It postulated that a division would have two to three battalions of tanks and argued for their independent use rather than their dispersal among the infantry echelons. The tank battalions

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

moved by bounds along parallel routes 5–10 kilometers ahead of the division main body. For protection, the detachments relied upon divisional reconnaissance elements to their front and their own security detachment patrols of three to five tanks operating on their flanks and in their rear. When entering combat the battalion operated in decentralized fashion on the initiative of the battalion commander but in consonance with the general mission of the division. Ground or air reconnaissance informed the battalion commanders of the enemy's presence and directed the tank subunit in the attack. On his own initiative, the battalion commander began the attack, while informing his higher commander of the situation.

If the enemy consisted of only infantry, or infantry with weak motor-mechanized units, the tank detachments conducted a surprise assault to destroy the motor-mechanized units and infantry. If, on the other hand, enemy motor-mechanized forces were superior, the actions of all the tank battalions were coordinated from the beginning into one strong attack organized by the division commander. One tank battalion commander commanded the entire force in a well planned operation.

Although this article postulated a force of three tank battalions, the inference was that one battalion could do likewise in a similar situation on a coordinated basis with its parent division. This type of article, in addition to casting the tank battalion into the mold of a forward detachment, marked a definite trend toward using tanks to lead the attack, a tendency which would increase to 1936.

Outside observers, who closely monitored Soviet writings, detected the newly emerging Soviet tactical and operational views. Although noting "the tactical principles set forth ... appear to be rather 'visionary'," one observer acknowledged they were of sufficient interest to warrant their being known.¹² The same observer, an Estonian General Staff officer, reviewed Soviet "deep tactics," and described them as "the simultaneous operation against the whole depth of the hostile combat zone with the mission of simultaneously engaging and annihilating all the hostile troops, no matter how far away they were located."¹³ He noted the new role played by armor in Soviet offensive concepts and quoted from a contemporary Soviet text which said the Red Army no longer considered the artillery as the principal weapon for annihilating the system of defensive fire in offensive combat. Tanks were now the principal weapon. According to the observer, Soviet offensive use of tanks involved three distinct tank echelons: distant action [*dal'nyi deistvie* – DD], immediate infantry support [*neposredstvennaia podderezhka pekhoty* – NPP], and distant

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

infantry support [*dal'naia podderzhka pekhoty* – DPP]. This accurately reflected Soviet views as did his summary of how the various tank groups would operate in combat.

After a short artillery preparation (30–60 minutes) during which DD tank groups conducted counterbattery fire and NPP groups fired on antitank weapons, the DPP and DD tank groups simultaneously assaulted enemy positions, the former to a depth of one to two kilometers to smash antitank and machine gun firing positions, and the latter to a depth of 15 kilometers to destroy enemy artillery positions, reserves, and headquarters. The two tank groups timed the attack on their objectives to coincide with the beginning of the infantry and NPP tank group assault. The infantry and support tanks then cleared enemy defensive positions. Leading tanks (DD) supported by aviation providing observation and fire support then wrought havoc in the enemy rear and began the pursuit.

Once the defense had been penetrated, and infantry had consolidated its positions, tanks and infantry began simultaneous exploitation operations into the enemy rear. Based on Soviet writings, the observer postulated the exploitation would be spearheaded by “a leading group [which] consists of two tank companies but normally a whole tank battalion (49 tanks) ... A leading group is able to transport an assault force of about 150 men who could assault [*desant*] into the enemy rear in the course of a few minutes. This *desant* force would be accompanied by 20–30 light machine guns.”¹⁴

Further, the observer speculated, based on Soviet writings, that the assault [*desant*] force could be accompanied by armored transportation, heavy machine guns, and mechanized artillery, which he assumed the Soviets were presently developing. The missions of these deep assault or exploitation forces were the destruction of reserves being brought forward from the rear and the capture of crossroads, defiles, command posts, headquarters, supply trains, signal centers, and tactically important localities. The American military attaché who forwarded this assessment to Washington cryptically noted at the end of his assessment, “In contrast to most of the Continental armies which cling tenaciously to the lessons learned in the World War, the Red Army tries to break away from the conservative traditions of the past and to experiment with mechanization, motorization, and all new means of warfare.”¹⁵ His description closely matches Soviet contemporary and *ex post facto* explanations of the role and function of forward detachments in deep battle.

A more comprehensive report transmitted by the same American attaché thoroughly reviewed Estonian General Staff assessments of

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

the Red Army as of March 1933. The extensive report reiterated the contents of the earlier report, provided more detail about the composition and function of the three Soviet tank groups, and gave more information on the role of the forward detachment in the Soviet offensive scheme. He noted, "There is no American military term which corresponds to 'forward detachment' – apparently forward detachments operate like reconnaissance detachments except that their mission is security rather than reconnaissance."¹⁶ He then spelled out their roles as he understood them in accordance with the new combat instructions of 1933 which had amended the 1929 regulations. DD (distant action) tank groups of at least two companies had the mission of operating against enemy artillery and other distant targets and disorganizing the enemy rear. These groups were normally formed in infantry [rifle] divisions, sometimes also in corps, and they pierced the defenses to a depth of 15 kilometers. In essence, they began the exploitation.

The attaché noted that when preparing for a meeting engagement, the Soviets used forward tank groups of two to three battalions per division which moved 5–10 kilometers ahead of their parent units with security units covering their front and flanks. These groups initiated the meeting engagement. If enemy motorized-mechanized units were present, attached tanks operated with the main reconnaissance detachments, the forward detachment, the advance guard, and the main body. In an engagement, the forward detachment followed the reconnaissance detachments "to hold important zones or points until the arrival of friendly troops; [otherwise] it operates similarly to a reconnaissance detachment."¹⁷

According to the attaché, during the pursuit strategic (army) cavalry and motor-mechanized units with tanks played a leading role. "Independent operations of tanks and tankettes in the parallel pursuit of the enemy [have] the objective of enveloping the main bodies of hostile withdrawing columns."¹⁸

Contemporary Soviet military writings illustrated how correct the Estonian General Staff estimates and attaché reports were. A March 1934 Soviet article analyzed the use of tanks and tankettes in the forward detachment of a division and described the mission of the forward detachment:

The mission of the forward detachment is the timely capture of tactically important localities and their retention until the arrival of the first units of the main body. Then the former loses its primary significance and becomes the contact group of the latter.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

Normally the forward detachment operates at a distance of 15–20 kilometers, on special occasions 80–100 kilometers in front of the main body. In the latter case the forward detachment is particularly strong, and its composition may amount to one-third of the whole force. The forward detachment operating under normal conditions is weaker, but it is required to conduct combat without reinforcements during the course of 3–5 hours in which time the first units arrive in the combat area.¹⁹

The author cited the ideal composition of a forward detachment as being one motorized infantry battalion, one tank or tankette company, one pioneer [engineer] platoon, one chemical warfare platoon, one radio station, and two motorcycles for liaison. The forward detachment usually first engaged enemy reconnaissance detachments and advance guards. The article went on to describe in detail how the forward detachment conducted combat, in particular how it employed its tanks and tankettes as shock units.

Two months later, another Soviet article described the changing mission of the advance guard in which an advance guard itself assumed a combat mission while on the march in anticipation of a meeting engagement. It stated:

Due to the introduction of motor-mechanized units, the methods of operations of modern advance guards have changed. Previously the advance guard, being amply equipped with artillery, held by defensive action the terrain necessary for the deployment of the main body into combat formation, operating later as a contact group, while a modern advance guard, reinforced by technical means, carries out this mission through an offensive. An advance guard reinforced by modern motor-mechanized units and supported by long-range artillery in encountering the enemy, instead of initiating a delaying action, is capable of destroying the hostile advance guard by rapid and powerful blows before the main body comes into action.²⁰

So configured, the advance guard was to energetically strike the enemy to the depth of his combat formation, to paralyze the infantry, artillery, and motor-mechanized units, and to isolate the enemy advance troops from the main body.

These assessments and articles captured the ferment in Soviet military thought of the earlier 1930s – a ferment characterized by a desire to use tanks and motorized-mechanized forces as far forward as possible to carry the battle immediately deep into the enemy defenses. The chief

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

manifestation of this trend was the tendency to employ combat units as far forward and as early as possible, including distant action tanks, forward detachments, more powerful advance guards, and motor-mechanized mobile groups. The net effect was the creation of a radically different combat scheme emphasizing the role of tanks and a blurring of the function and composition of traditional advance guards and newer forward detachments and mobile groups. While each was still referred to separately, their functions seemed to merge in the stormy development of concepts for deep battle and deep operations.

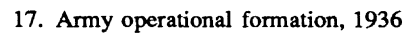
To further complicate this mosaic, theory was clearly outstripping technological advances and the design or production capacity of the Soviet armaments industry. These trends became abundantly clear with the publication in 1936 of a new field service *Regulation* and in the stormy years which followed.

Under the direction of Marshal M.N. Tukhachevsky, a new field regulation was promulgated in 1936, one designed to implement fully the concept of deep operations. The new regulation called for:

The simultaneous suppression of the enemy defense throughout its entire depth by air strikes and artillery, a penetration of the tactical defense zone by attacking formations on a broad front by use of armored forces, and a decisive development of tactical success into operational with the aim of full encirclement and destruction of the enemy. The main role was assigned to the infantry, in whose interests were organized the cooperation of all forces.²¹

The regulation required use of two tank groups (DD, NPP) to support the conduct of the penetration operation (Figure 17). Distant action tanks (DD) deployed forward several minutes before the completion of the artillery preparation and then attacked, supported by distant action artillery, through the forward defenses and into the tactical depths. Thereafter, the infantry assaulted, supported by infantry support tanks to complete the penetration. Finally the mobile group (echelon to exploit success) [*eshelon razvitiye proryv* – ERP], in the form of a mechanized corps, joined battle to exploit into the operational depths.

The mobile group entered battle one of three ways. First, if the defense was weak and lacked operational reserves, the group advanced immediately, before the main forces had completed the tactical penetration. Second, and more common, the mobile group attacked when a breach had formed in the defense. Against an average strength defense the Soviets believed this would be at the end of the first day of



EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

operations. Finally, if the defense was strong and deep, several days of combat were required before the defense could be penetrated. In this case, the mobile group participated in overcoming the tactical defenses. This, however, could severely erode mobile group strength and hinder its subsequent exploitation.

Forward detachments played a role in several distinct phases of the operation. The regulation was general in tone and specifically mentioned use of forward detachments only twice, regarding exploitation and the conduct of maneuver. It stated:

It is highly important to anticipate the enemy at favorable lines or positions and to seize important key points. An effort must always be made to seize lines favorable for deployment of forces and to compel the enemy to take up positions in unfavorable terrain. It is particularly important to seize lines affording good observation points for the artillery. This mission devolves upon the divisional reconnaissance battalions or specially designated forward detachments from among the various types of forces.²²

This failure to specify distinct forward detachment missions was in part due to the early and deep use of distant action tanks, which themselves operated in a manner similar to forward detachments and, in part, because of the brevity of the regulation. Contemporary articles, some written by those who worked on the regulation, and other more recent assessments cast further light on the role of forward detachments as they served both the main force and the echelon for the development of success.

G. Isserson, an associate of Tukhachevsky and a survivor of the subsequent purges, sketched out the forward detachment's role in mobile group operations.²³ In an attack against a weak defense the mobile groups penetrated and secured the second offensive belt and then dispatched forward motorized detachments and reconnaissance elements to a depth of 50 kilometers. The detachments played less significant roles at more limited depths in other attack variations. Other sources described the role forward detachments played in the exploitation phase, the most important of which was to conduct river crossings in advance of the main force and seize key terrain obstacles and objectives which would facilitate a rapid main force advance.

An appreciation of the 1936 regulation by the US attaché in Moscow emphasized the role forward detachments played in the meeting engagement, stating, "The forward detachment seizes limits [positions] for the advance guard. The advance guard, in independent and resolute operations, destroys the enemy's advance guard before the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

arrival of main forces of the enemy.”²⁴ He then described the function of the distant action (DD) tank group and underscored the similarities between the function of the tank group and the forward detachment, “The groups of DD [tanks] have as their task the penetration of the rear areas of the main forces of the defensive enemy in order to destroy his reserves, staff headquarters, and the main group of artillery, and to block the routes of withdrawal for his main forces.”²⁵

In fact, as initially interpreted, the 1936 regulation reduced the distinction between distant action tank groups and forward detachments. Since DD tank groups operated pre-emptively and well forward, there was little need for forward detachments to perform a forward combat function during a penetration operation. Once the penetration phase was complete and exploitation began, the forward detachment would again be useful. Therefore, it was mentioned in the exploitation phase as a means of securing key objectives to facilitate a high rate of advance. As before, forward detachments also played a role in the conduct of marches and meeting engagements, although they were still closely associated with strong advance guards, which themselves had a distinct combat function.

TURBULENCE AND REASSESSMENT – 1937–1941

Major changes in Soviet offensive concepts occurred after 1937, prompted by a variety of changing conditions. The purges of the officer corps, which began in 1937 and continued into 1941, liquidated the Red Army high command and most advanced military thinkers. This certainly had a negative effect on the dynamism of Soviet military thought and the ability of the Soviets to react to other changing conditions.

Actual war experience also had a major effect on Soviet military thought and, consequently, force structure as well. Systematic Soviet evaluation of, first, the Spanish Civil War and war in China and, later, warfare in Finland, cast serious doubt on the validity of concepts contained in the 1936 regulations, in particular regarding the combat use of tanks well forward in operational and combat formations.²⁶

The Soviets sent “volunteers” and equipment to assist the Loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War. There they tested a variety of combat concepts, including the use of tanks in penetrating enemy defenses. Analysis of these experiences indicated that tanks operating well forward, even with infantry support, were extremely vulnerable to enemy fire. Machine gun fire stripped infantry protection from the tanks; and artillery, air strikes, heavy machine guns, and a variety of

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

homemade devices (e.g., molotov cocktail incendiaries) took a heavy toll on the lightly armored tanks. These real battlefield problems required real conceptual solutions.

Consequently, throughout 1938 and 1939, intense debate occurred within the General Staff and officer corps over the combat use of armor and the feasibility of concepts outlined in the 1936 *Field Service Regulation*. This debate was reflected in Soviet contemporary military writings, across a range of Soviet journals and newspapers and was later reflected by articles in the General Staff journal *Voennaia Mysl'* [Military Thought] and in new field service regulations.

From June to December 1938 a debate raged in the pages of *Krasnaia Zvezda* [Red Star] prompted by an initial article by Kombrig [Brigade commander] F. Kuznetsov. Kuznetsov argued that penetration of an enemy defense required combined arms operations of infantry, tanks, and artillery:

Infantry, preceded by an artillery barrage, supported by attached tanks and artillery, secured against aerial attacks by antiaircraft guns and its own aviation, destroys the enemy by a vigorous attack. ... The second and following echelons are put into action where success is achieved.²⁷

The article clearly rejected the feasibility of using tank-pure formations (DD tanks) to effect a penetration. The editor, in characteristic fashion, added his "hopes that the readers of *Krasnaia Zvezda* will express their opinion on the questions touched upon by Comrade Kuznetsov," and they did so in the ensuing debate.²⁸ Some authors argued for the validity of deep operations, but most cited evidence from war experiences that more systematic means for penetrating modern defenses had to be developed than simple use of tank-heavy formations. According to one writer, "The modern state of antitank defenses, the development of artillery, and the experience of employing aviation on the battlefield clearly show that the role of tanks for distant operations in the simultaneous suppression of the enemy defense should be re-examined."²⁹ The ensuing debate clarified the issue, generated similar articles in other journals and ultimately shaped the form of the 1941 regulations.

Throughout the debate, the role of armor in general, and forward detachments, by implication perceptibly changed. The role of tanks in a penetration operation changed from one of independent action to one of support for infantry in a combined arms sense. One observer wrote:

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

In conclusion, it may be said that, in modern offensive combat, tanks will play a very real role as preservers of infantry personnel.

The present experience of the wars in Spain and China must compel us to reconsider certain features of tank tactics and tank construction, especially with reference to tanks of the first echelon. These tanks must be slow, but more heavily armored, and have increased maneuverability.³⁰

The post-1938 interpretation of the 1936 regulation de-emphasized the role of armor in a penetration operation. A single tank group for infantry support [*tanki podderzhki pekhoty* – TPP] replaced the earlier two groups and cooperated with infantry and artillery to conduct the penetration operation. As before, after the penetration had occurred, a mobile group exploited success from the second echelon. This new view coincided with the Soviet decision in November 1939 to abolish the large tank (formerly mechanized) corps and replace them with motorized divisions and large medium and heavy tank brigades.³¹

The German invasions of Poland and France in 1939 and 1940 startled the Soviets and caused them to reflect on the changes they had made after 1937.³² Certainly the German experience proved the utility of using large mobile groups to exploit deep into the operational depths. However, Soviet analysis left unresolved the question of using large tank formations to produce a rapid breakthrough of tactical defenses. A combined arms approach seemed the best answer. Consequently, the Soviets continued to rely on an extensive first echelon of infantry support tanks integrated with infantry, artillery, and other supporting arms to effect the penetration. The regulation of 1941 was the final expression of these Soviet offensive concepts. To beef up the exploitation echelon, the Soviets began creating new, larger mechanized corps to serve as enlarged *front* and army mobile groups.

Examination of Soviet writings from late 1938 to June 1941 demonstrated continued Soviet belief in the usefulness of forward detachments in a variety of situations. On the march and when anticipating a meeting engagement, Soviet forces employed reconnaissance units, forward detachments, and security elements (advance guards). This permitted timely deployment of forces and prevented the enemy from conducting successful meeting engagements. Forward detachments had the mission of seizing and holding important positions to disrupt enemy movement or facilitate friendly force deployments. In the wake of German experiences, the Soviets placed higher importance on the meeting engagements and concluded combat elements had to be deployed well forward. The forward detachment suited this need.

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Specifically, "the forward detachment will be sent out with a two-fold mission: either for covering the regions of deployment or for securing assigned positions if contact with enemy ground forces is possible."³³ The Soviets correctly noted the importance of communications and the danger of isolation of the forward detachment.

When approaching the enemy defense, Soviet forces foresaw using forward detachments to overcome the enemy security zone and gain advantageous positions from which the main force could commence action against the main enemy defensive position:

For the destruction of covering units, and combat security, and for more detailed reconnaissance of the enemy forward area, forward detachments are sent out (if not sent out earlier), consisting of motorized infantry, reinforced with tanks, artillery, sappers, and chemical subunits. Under cover of forward detachments or reconnaissance organs, and sometimes specially designated subunits, the commander of the formation with commanders of staffs and units moves forward to conduct a commanders' reconnaissance. At that time the formation arrives in the assembly area, 10–12 kilometers distant from enemy positions, where it checks its vehicles and weapons and carries out other attack preparations.

The dispatched forward detachments, together with reconnaissance organs, skillfully approach the covering units and security of the enemy, penetrate the gaps and intervals, envelop the flanks, and destroy them by strikes from the rear while not permitting them to withdraw to the main defensive zone. Further, they secure the forward edge, to seize positions for deployment of the formation; to determine unoccupied or weakly occupied sectors in the enemy positions, the system of antitank defense, regions of battery firing positions, systems of machine gun fire, and observation and command points.³⁴

After main forces had penetrated the first defensive zone, lead rifle corps created forward detachments, consisting of motorized infantry, tanks, and artillery to commence penetration of the second defensive zone. Thereafter the mobile groups joined battle to complete the penetration and develop the exploitation into the operational depths.

"The mobile group, consisting of a mechanized corps, was introduced into the penetration in a sector of 10–12 kilometers. This allowed the columns to proceed 5–9 kilometers from the open flanks of the enemy and thus hamper the conduct of his light artillery fire on them [the mobile group]."³⁵

The lead tank division of the mobile group sent out reconnaissance

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

and forward detachments which, after the penetration of the main defensive zone, "rushed to the second with the mission of seizing fire systems and fortifications revealed in that area."³⁶ Later, the detachments also secured important positions, defiles, passes, etc. in the enemy's rear defensive zone to facilitate movement of the tank group.

The Soviets also recognized the important function of forward detachments during the pursuit. After a penetration operation, all command levels in both main attack and secondary sectors were to begin a pursuit to disrupt enemy withdrawal. Only forward detachments could capitalize on the fragmented nature of withdrawals and use maneuver to isolate, outflank, and encircle withdrawing units:

Combined arms formations must, when going over to the pursuit, organize pursuit detachments using, in the first instance, organic mobile units. The nucleus of these pursuit detachments must be infantry, riding on vehicles. These detachments must seize hold of the enemy, destroy rear guard units and, where possible, penetrate into the enemy's main force column, distract them and disrupt the planned march/withdrawal.³⁷

One of the most important forward detachment's pursuit missions was to seize and hold river crossings to facilitate passage of the water obstacle by the main force. Soviet writings stressed the importance of using strong reconnaissance detachments and combat-capable forward detachments to effect such crossings. The 1941 Field Service Regulation stated, "During the approach to river lines, one should strive to secure crossings quickly and by surprise by means of forward detachments, advance guards, and air assaults. ..."³⁸ Another source added, "The forward detachment should consist of tanks, infantry, engineer, chemical troops, and artillery and also the technical equipment for ferrying. ... The tank must have not less than two main crossings. ..."³⁹ While the crossing was to be conducted in dispersed fashion, once across the river the detachment was to operate decisively in a single body to consolidate a large enough bridgehead for the main force to deploy into.

Even on the defense, the Soviets articulated missions for forward detachments, principally as the chief combat force in the security zone. Thus:

The security zone (forward defensive positions) is fitted out with obstacles. Reconnaissance units and forward detachments operate within it. ... Forward detachment forces (infantry, sappers, and chemical forces) develop and defend the security

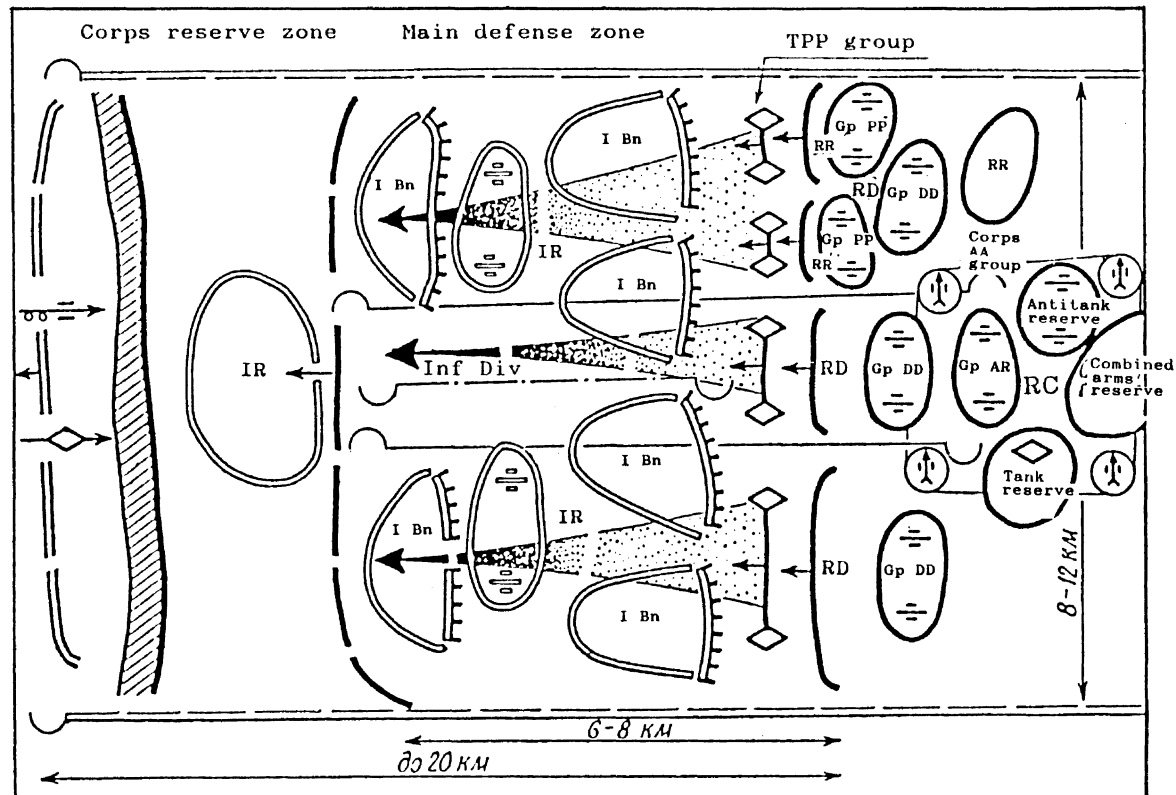
EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

zone with the use of engineer forces attached to them for that end. The strength and composition of the detachments depends on the mission assigned them, the nature of the terrain, and the width of the defensive front. They operate according to the method of a mobile defense.⁴⁰

By June 1941 the Soviets had developed thoroughly the theoretical use of both operational and tactical maneuver forces (Figure 18). The former were to exploit penetration operations systematically and were represented by the large mobile forces (mechanized corps) which would commit to combat as *front* or army mobile groups. The Soviets firmly believed that only a combined arms force could effect a penetration and, thereafter, operational maneuver forces, if protected by aviation, could successfully exploit into the operational depths.

Tactical maneuver forces occupied an equally important theoretical position. These forces, in the form of forward detachments, served as advanced combat elements of both mobile and rifle forces. During the march, they projected combat power forward into the sector where reconnaissance and security forces operated to provide an essential combat force to disrupt enemy deployments and facilitate friendly force movements. When approaching enemy defenses, tank-heavy forward detachments overcame enemy security forces and began the process of successful commitment to battle of main force formations. During the penetration operation forward detachments helped overcome enemy positions in the depth of the tactical defense, from the march, and assisted the forward progress of the exploiting mobile groups. Finally, on the exploitation and in anticipation of meeting engagements, forward detachments served as a pre-emptive combat force, whose employment provided an edge for friendly exploiting forces. By 1941 the Soviets had also carved out a distinctive role for forward detachments on the defense as a stiffening element for the defenders of a security zone.

Theoretically, in fact, by 1941 the whole panoply of forward detachment functions, which would emerge in the future, had emerged in almost full form. But, as was so often the case, Soviet theory proceeded well in advance of reality. For a variety of reasons, the Soviets found it difficult, if not impossible, to translate theory into practice. Certainly, the circumstances of June 1941 – the devastating surprise attack – categorically ruled out systematic and effective Soviet response. But there were other negative factors as well. The loss of the leading Soviet theoreticians to the purges deprived the Soviet military of the opportunity to artfully respond to changing combat conditions and perhaps



Offensive of a rifle corps according to prewar views.

18. Army operational formation, 1941

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

even construct a more suitable defense against German militarism. The technological lag of the Red Army deprived it of the radios and other communications equipment necessary to make such complex operational and tactical techniques function properly.

Advances in Soviet equipment development indicated a real appreciation of what was required. For example, the new T-34 medium tank and the KV heavy tank offered prospects for overcoming the deficiencies noted in Spain and, perhaps, returning to concepts for the use of armor abandoned after 1937. But Soviet industry was incapable of producing the equipment quickly enough; and, when produced, the tanks suffered from maintenance problems which inhibited their effective use. Moreover, the complex logistical system necessary to make Soviet military concepts work was simply not in place.

For all these reasons, Soviet combat performance in virtually all areas lived up to neither the Soviets' nor Western expectations. The ensuing disasters of 1941, while creating immense obstacles for the Soviets to overcome, blinded Westerners to the military progress the Soviets had achieved in the 1930s and forced the Soviets to address anew the matter of translating good theoretical concepts into usable, effective combat techniques. This they would have to do in difficult circumstances during a war which threatened their very existence.

THE TEST OF WAR

General

War swept like a storm into the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 raining destruction on the Red Army in the border regions. The surprise German thrusts paralyzed the Soviet High Command and many *front* and army commands, leaving the lower level units to contend as best they could with the best trained and most battle tested forces in Europe, which had just vanquished Europe's most highly touted land army.

The Red Army forces in the Western Military Districts reacted in accordance with pre-war regulations within the constraints of existing plans, organization, and equipment. Even the best of forces is placed at a disadvantage by effective enemy employment of surprise. A force beset by the institutional and structural problems faced by the Red Army in June 1941 was condemned to a desperate battle for survival. That it was able to survive the first six months of war, albeit with disastrous losses, attested to the resilience of the Russian nation in general and the stoicism and bravery of those forces which had to live through the devastation of 1941.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The desperate Red Army struggle for survival in 1941 and, by extension, in 1942, encompassed what the Soviets call the first period of war. The period was characterized by German strategic dominance, punctuated by the Soviet general counteroffensive of late 1941 which temporarily wrested the initiative from German hands. During this period the Soviets first truncated their pre-war force structure to match the capability of their commanders and then, in 1942, began the painfully slow process of rebuilding a force capable of conducting modern operations. Throughout the period the Soviets tested and validated forces and concepts for waging war at virtually all levels – in some instances adjusting pre-war techniques and, in other cases, creating new combat techniques. The process was a slow and often costly one; but, by late 1942, it bore fruit as the strategic initiative again swung into Soviet hands at Stalingrad.

Among those combat techniques tested were pre-war concepts for conduct of operational and tactical maneuver. Soviet capabilities for conducting either type of maneuver evaporated in the initial German onslaught and were only partially revived during the desperate counteroffensive around Moscow in December 1941 and January 1942. Through considerable testing, often by trial and error, the Soviet appreciation of and talent for maneuver returned. More important, the Soviets were to define requirements necessary for the conduct of both operational and tactical maneuver and to solve problems apparent in the Moscow operation. By late 1942, the Soviets had solved the problem of maneuver and defined tentative solutions to the problem. Their ultimate test occurred in November 1942 at Stalingrad, and they passed it impressively.

During the second period of war (19 November 1942–31 December 1943), the Soviets simultaneously refined their concepts for conducting maneuver and tested new forces suited to that purpose. By July 1943 the theoretical framework for successful maneuver, a return to “deep operations” theory, was present as was a mobile force necessary to carry it out. The Soviets tested these new concepts and forces through the remainder of 1943 as the strategic momentum of war swung irrevocably in their favor.

The third period of war (1944–45) marked the maturation of both concepts and forces, measured in part by burgeoning offensive success conditioned by growing Soviet numerical superiority, the soundness of Soviet offensive theory, and the skill of Soviet forces, in particular those designated with the function of performing operational and tactical maneuver.⁴¹

This maturation process was based on thorough study and exploita-

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

tion of combat experience to capture in orders and regulations techniques which actually worked in combat and to create units which could first survive, then function, and finally emerge victorious in battle.⁴² The process is measurable in terms of operational maneuver capability and in terms of tactical maneuver skills. The evolving role of forward detachments was but one element of the mosaic portraying the maturation of an army during war.

The Soviets used forward detachments to little avail in the opening months of war and again with marginal results around Moscow in late 1941. After often futile experimentation with tactical maneuver during the summer of 1942, they began to achieve and appreciate results of tactical maneuver in operations around Stalingrad and along the Don River in late 1942 and early 1943. Study of these operations markedly improved tactical maneuver techniques and forward detachment structure in the summer of 1943. Thereafter, through the spring of 1944, forward detachments played an increasingly effective role in operations, although they often fell short of achieving their full potential.

From the summer of 1944 through the end of the war, forward detachments contributed extensively to Soviet offensive efforts by conducting tactical maneuver as a prerequisite for the successful conduct of operational maneuver. By 1945 their ubiquitousness and effectiveness conditioned strategic offensive success. They led virtually every offensive which penetrated into the operational-strategic depths; they served as the spearhead of deep exploitation; they contributed to successful deception; and, most important, they became the essential coordinating link between the two principal elements of the massive Red Army, the large mobile force of tank armies and tank and mechanized corps and the lumbering mass of basically rifle armies comprising the Red Army's main force. Indeed they became the glue which made the whole force a cohesive entity.

The First Period

Detailed analysis of combat during the initial period of war reveals that whenever and wherever possible Red Army units responded to the German attack in accordance with their pre-war regulations. Of course, units deployed along the border had no option but to defend in place. Divisions and corps, which had only part of their strength in forward positions, deployed their remaining forces forward to reinforce the defense or deal with penetrating German forces. Confusion reigned in these forces, produced on the one hand by surprise and on the other by German dominance of the air.

Soviet forces deploying from the depths responded according to

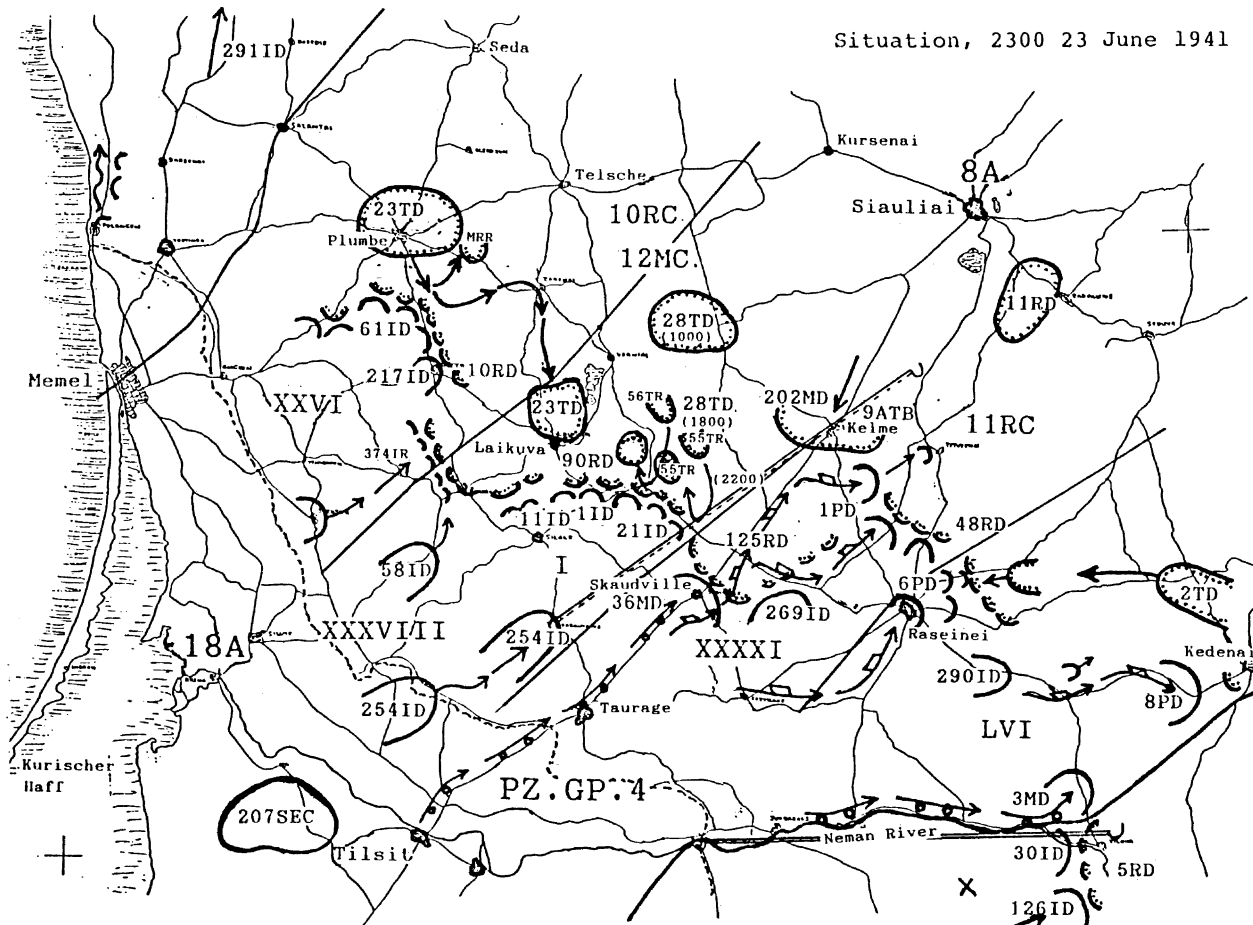
THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

existing plans which called for the delivery of strong counterattacks to drive the invaders back, as unrealistic as those counterattacks may have seemed. Despite German air superiority and understandable haste, these Soviet forces deployed forward in proper march formation in the expectation of meeting engagements. Most employed strong forward detachments or advance guards. Several examples will suffice.

In the Baltic Military District, Colonel General F. I. Kuznetsov, the Northwestern Front commander, ordered his 12th Mechanized and a portion of 3d Mechanized Corps to conduct a coordinated counter-attack which ultimately involved three tank divisions.⁴³ Although interdicted by German air attack and hampered by resultant logistical difficulties, all three divisions launched their attacks, albeit in piecemeal and uncoordinated fashion (Figures 19–20). Colonel I. D. Cherniakhovsky's 28th Tank Division led 12th Mechanized Corps' attack with its reinforced 55th Tank Regiment serving as an advance guard but with a distinct combat mission. The regiment of 40 tanks, deployed in two columns, struck advancing German infantry forces north of Kaitinai and forced the Germans to halt their advance temporarily. Heavy German air attacks, a break down in Soviet logistics, the fragility of Cherniakhovsky's old and light tanks, and absence of proper coordination between the three tank divisions frustrated Soviet plans; and, within two days, Cherniakhovsky's forces were streaming northward in defeat.

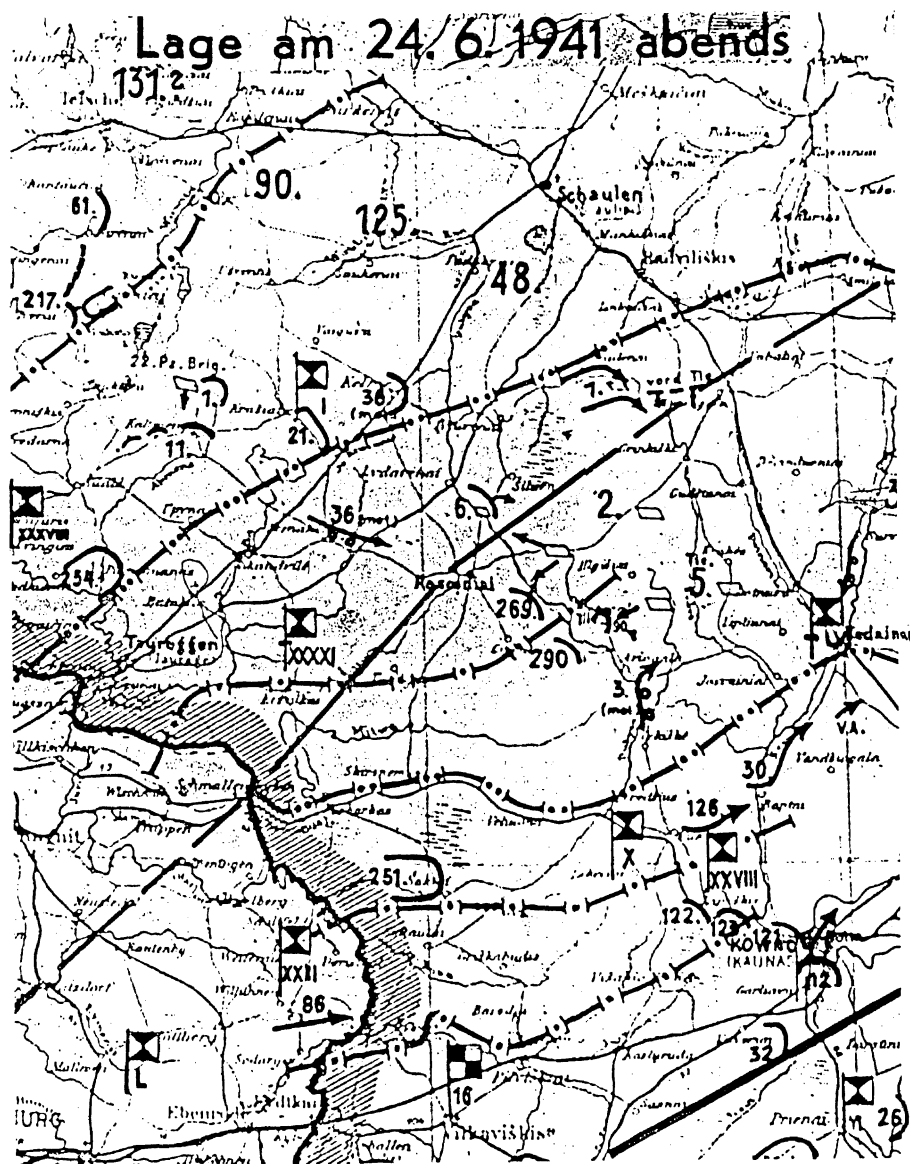
In the Special Kiev Military District, Colonel General M. P. Kirponis responded to the German invasion by ordering two mechanized corps (15th and 22d) to halt the German advance along the border and three other corps (8th, 9th, and 19th) to conduct a coordinated counterattack on penetrating German panzer columns.⁴⁴ Despite severe German air strikes and consequent logistical failures, all five corps responded by advancing to the sound of the guns. The 15th Mechanized Corps ordered its subordinate tank divisions to dispatch strong forward detachments northwestward from the Brody area to block the German advance, while the main force followed (Figures 21–22). The forward detachment of 10th Tank Division ran into German 11th Panzer Division near Radekhov and was severely damaged, although it did buy time for its parent unit to erect a fairly stable defense further south. The 37th Tank Division's forward detachment, operating further east, also ran into 11th Panzer, but fared less well. In general, the 15th Mechanized Corps' forward detachments slowed but did not halt the German advance. But they did delay the Germans sufficiently for their parent corps to erect defenses which held for several days.

As German armored spearheads drove eastward through Dubno,

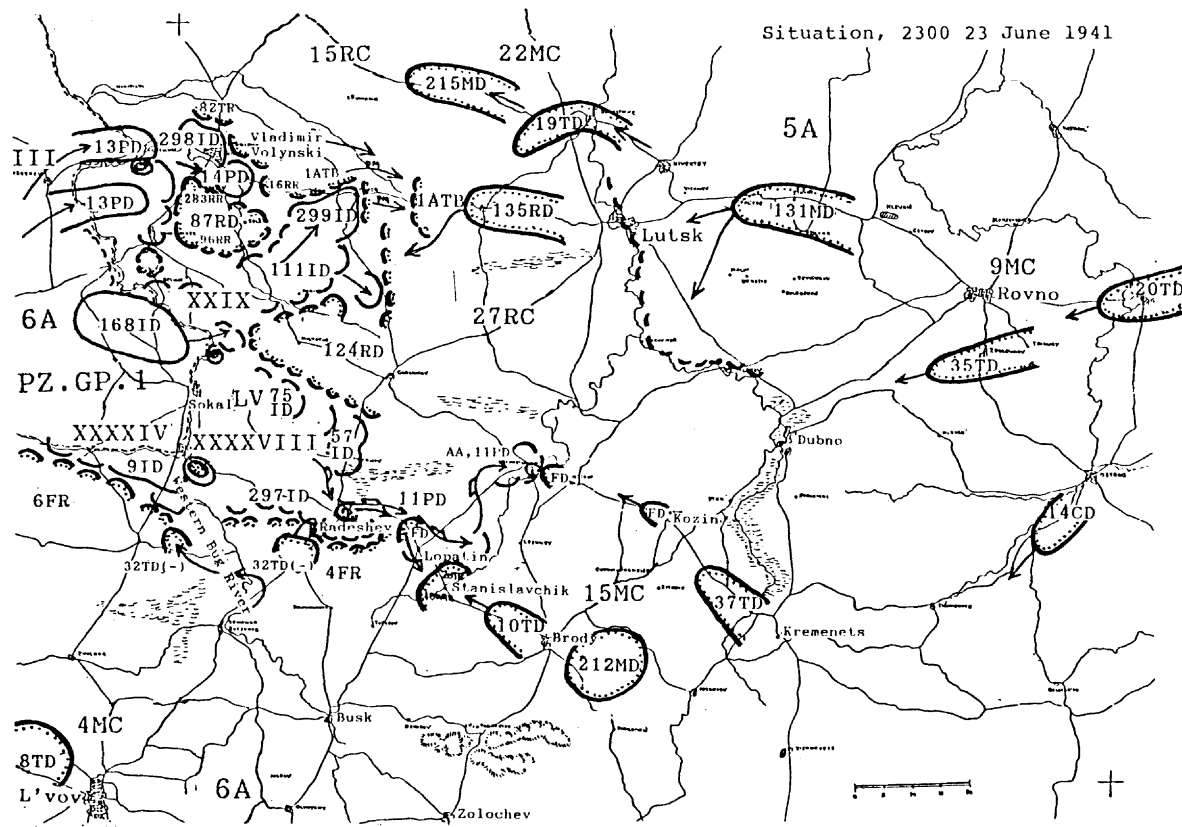


19. 12th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 23 June 1941

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



20. German intelligence view, 24 June 1941



EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

21. 15th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 23 June 1941

Feindlage
Stand 24.6.2000

S.K.D.

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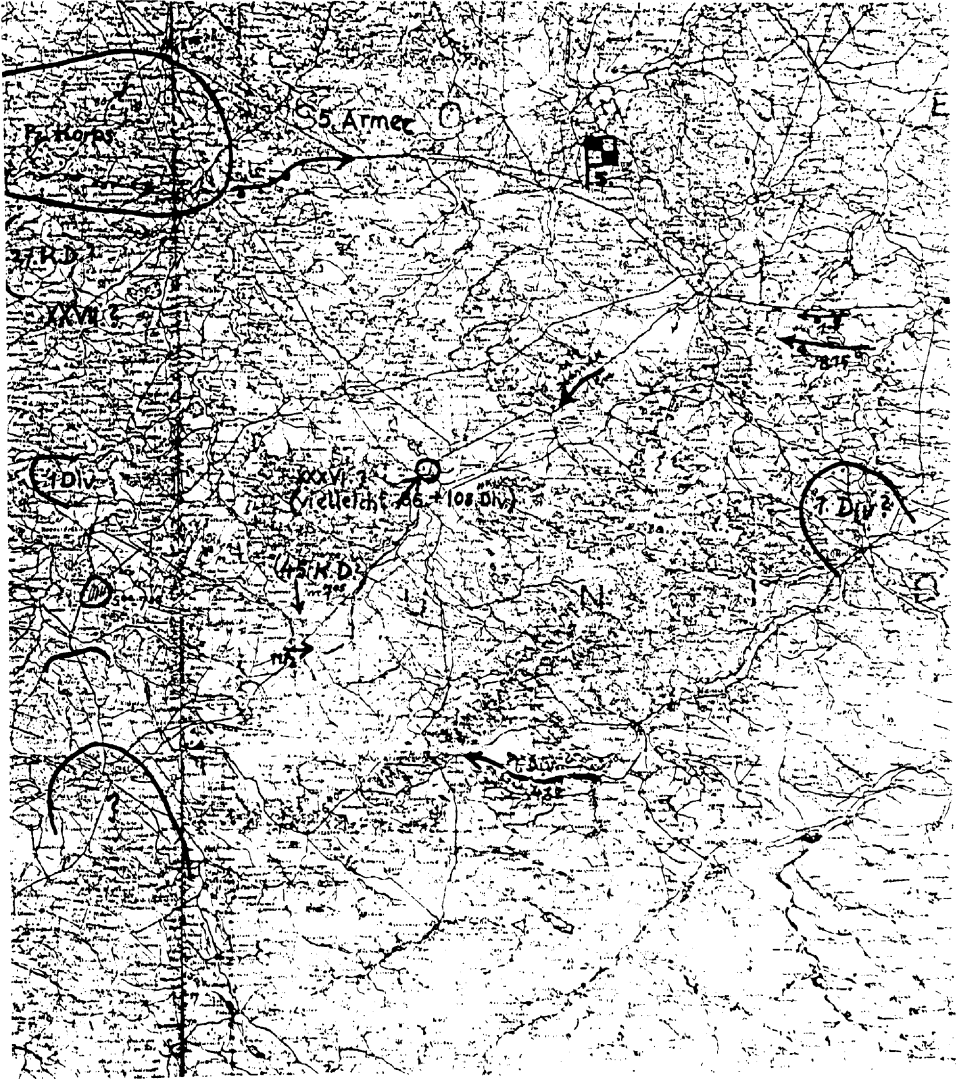
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EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

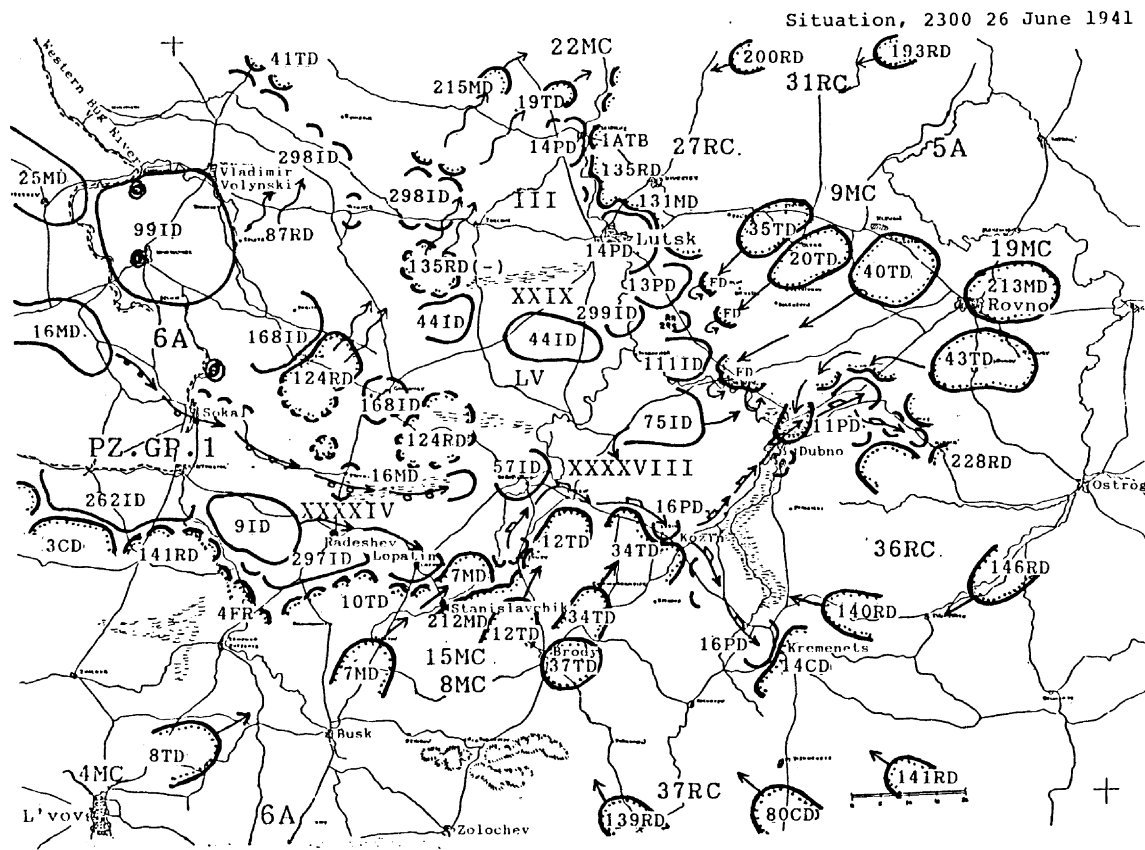
Kirponis ordered a coordinated counterattack by 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps from the northeast and by 8th Mechanized Corps from the southwest (Figures 23–24). All three corps launched their counterattacks after lengthy marches and used forward detachments to lead the assaults. An assistant commander of Major General N. V. Feklenko's 19th Mechanized Corps described the corps' operational formation:

We received the signal for the beginning of the offensive exactly at 9 o'clock on 26 June. Corps forces began moving. The day before, in accordance with an order of *Komkor* [corps commander] Feklenko, the commanders of the tank divisions created forward detachments, which moved off first. In front of each detachment moved an advanced party (GPZ) on tanks, and following them a motorized rifle and tank battalion and two antitank artillery batteries. A 122mm howitzer battalion was dispersed throughout the column. To the right and to the left, flank parties, each consisting of a tank platoon, advanced along country roads, and simply virgin lands within the limits of sight.

The forward detachment of 46th Tank Division under the control of the 80th Tank Regiment commander Lt. Col. N. Zybin had the mission of attacking in the general direction of Mlinov. The detachment of the 43d Tank Division was commanded by the 85th Tank Regiment commander Major N. M. Alabushev. Its column moved on Dubno. The mission of both detachments was to attack audaciously, penetrate the forward enemy subunits, reach the line of the Ikva River, and secure and hold crossings over the river until the main forces arrived.⁴⁵

Major General K. K. Rokossovsky's 19th Mechanized Corps' tank divisions (20th and 35th), advancing on 9th Mechanized Corps' right flank, employed similar detachments in what was supposed to be a well-coordinated counterstroke against the advancing Germans' left flank. In fact, the forward detachments fulfilled their roles successfully. They seized crossings over the Ikva River, penetrated into Dubno, and ultimately forced the Germans to alter their offensive plans to deal with the new threat. The flexible German response finally defeated this wing of the counterattack and drove Soviet forces back.

Analysis of the operation reveals the causes of the Soviet failure. In their haste to move forward and launch the attack, and under constant air attack, the attacking Soviet tank divisions became over-extended. High armor attrition rates, generally caused by logistical and maintenance reasons, led the commanders to concentrate their



23. 9th and 19th Mechanized Corps counterattacks, 26 June 1941

Armeeoberkommando 6
Führungsabteilung

Lagenkarte 1/2 27.
zum
Kriegstagebuche 1/2 6
(Lagenkartenmappe 1/2)
Lage: Feind- eigene Lage.
26.6.41 24.00 Uhr

45 mot.
Tle B6
TK 27 K D 2

991

298

168

262

3 K D

9

297

141
Tle 152

296

295

71

159

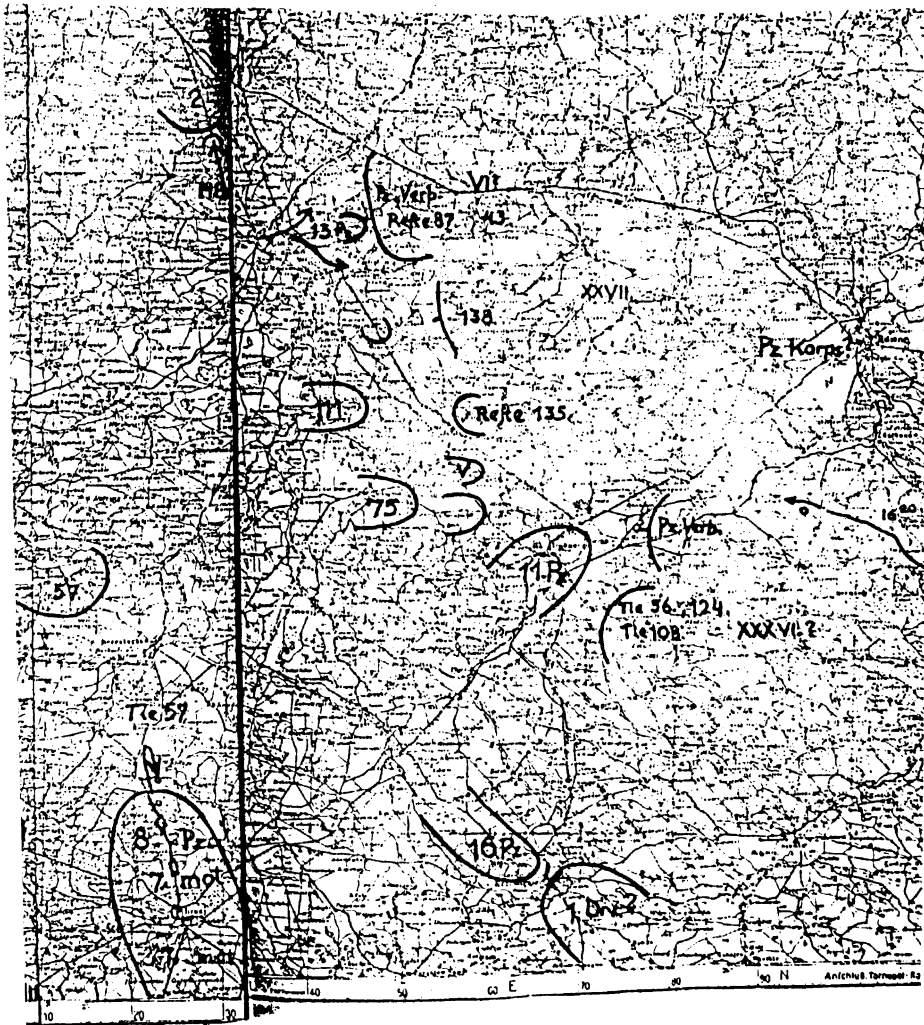
10 Pz

7 mot. mach.

100

106

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

most serviceable tanks in the forward detachments. In addition to the piecemeal nature of the advance, follow-on forces necessary to reinforce the attack were either weak or not available at all, in part also due to German air interdiction. Moreover, the forward detachments of the four divisions advanced on too broad a front, out of mutual supporting distance. As a result, the Germans redeployed their forces, isolated the Soviet units, and either destroyed them or forced them to retreat.

The Soviet southern counterattack force (8th Mechanized Corps) committed its full 34th Tank Division and a reinforced forward detachment of 12th Tank Division in a thrust into the German rear west of Dubno (Figures 25–26). Again, after some anxious moments, German forces adjusted (by turning 16th Panzer Division 180° on its axis), and isolated and finally destroyed the Soviet force.

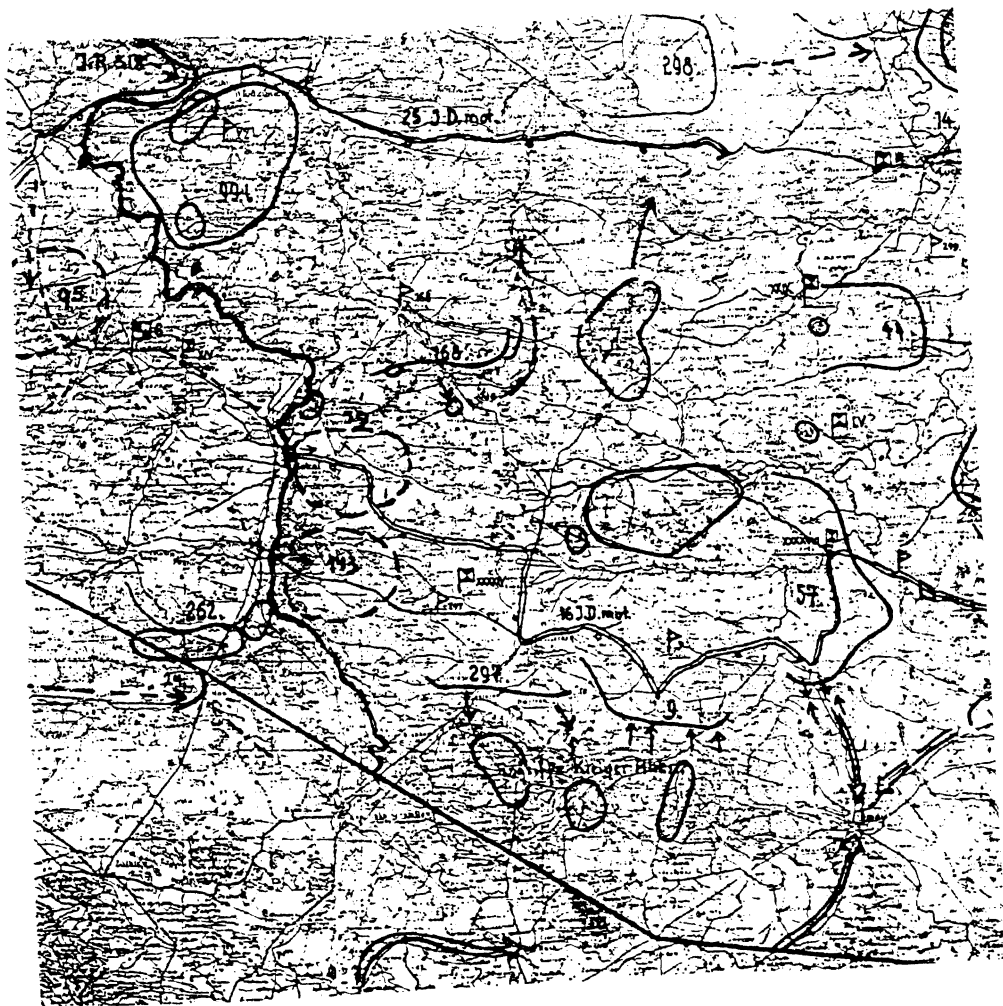
Operations by Soviet mechanized forces in the Ukraine typified Soviet attempts to conduct operational and tactical maneuver in the opening days of war. In the end, these attempts were frustrated by a combination of conditions including the effect of the surprise attack; clumsy command and control (few if any radios); unavailability of new equipment and equipment failures; collapse of the logistical system; and, finally, greater German tactical skill.

Throughout subsequent operations in late fall 1941, the Soviets had few opportunities to engage in offensive action. Where they attempted to conduct counterattacks, these were piecemeal affairs (Smolensk, July–August), made so by the rapidly developing German offensive. By mid-summer, the bulk of Soviet mechanized forces had either been destroyed by the Germans or abolished by the Soviets. The Soviets engaged in a conscious program to truncate the size of units so that inexperienced commanders could conduct more successful operations. Consequently, by December 1941 the largest Soviet tank force was the separate tank brigade with a TOE strength of 46 tanks, hardly a force capable of spearheading a major offensive or one capable of organizing an elaborate combat formation. With offensive opportunities few and far between and forces severely reduced in size, there were few opportunities to implement thoroughly ideas contained in the 1936 and 1941 regulations. This applied to the systematic use of forward detachments to condition offensive success. Hence, a close examination of operations around Moscow shows a patchwork quilt use of specific combat techniques.

The Soviet Moscow counteroffensive began on 5 December and, in time, developed into a general offensive all across the central sector of the Eastern Front. The Soviets attempted to conduct deep operational

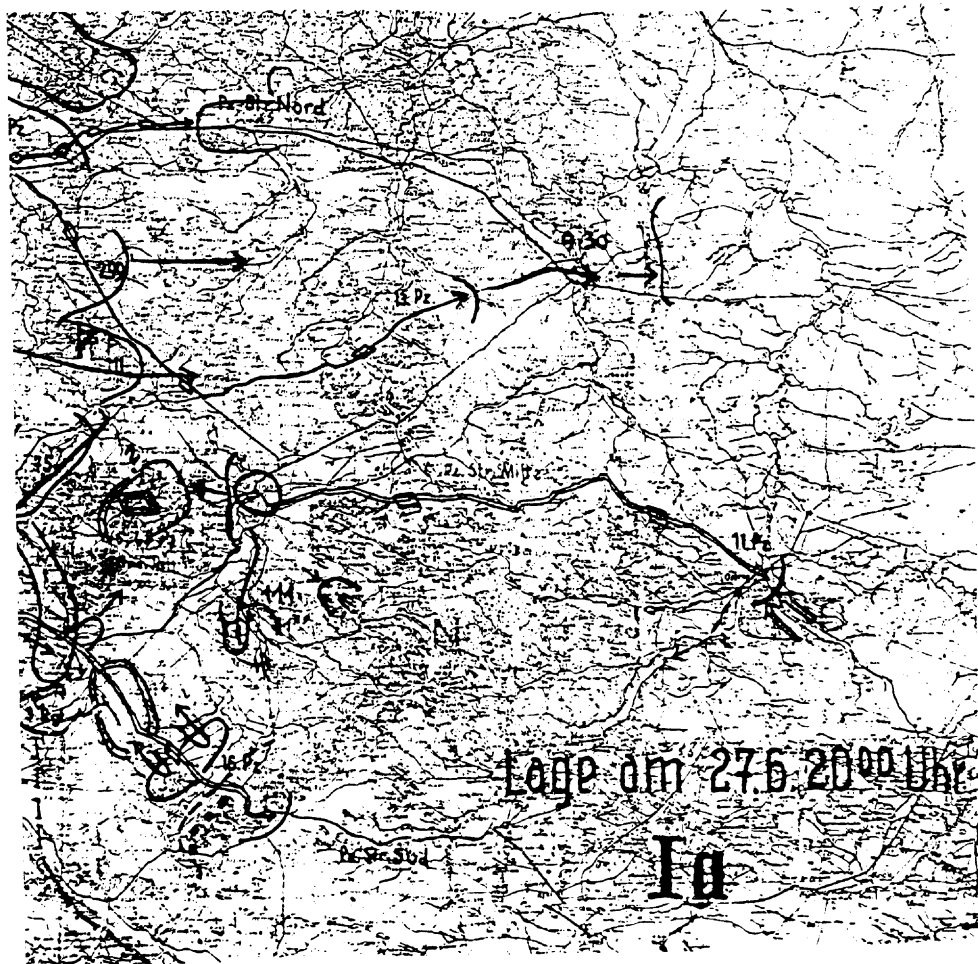
25. 8th Mechanized Corps counterattack, 27 June 1941

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



26. German situation map, 27 June 1941

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

maneuver with a variety of relatively light forces, including cavalry corps and divisions, ski battalions, airborne forces, and, in some instances, separate tank brigades and even rifle forces. Although the Soviets were able to penetrate German defenses in many sectors and dispatch mobile forces into the German rear, their forces were too fragile and outgunned to achieve their ultimate aims (the encirclement and destruction of Army Group Center). The Soviet mobile units secured the countryside in the German rear, but the more mobile and heavily armored German forces held the roads and villages. Although the Germans were forced to withdraw from the close approaches to Moscow and were confronted by large Soviet forces in their rear areas, stalemate ensued until drier summer weather permitted the Germans to eradicate the threat in their rear area.

During the Moscow counteroffensive, the Soviets employed tactical maneuver by forward detachments generally to lead and develop the pursuit after German defenses were penetrated. Western Front Directive No.0103 of 13 December 1941 ordered generalized use of forward detachments in the pursuit, stating, "Conduct the pursuit swiftly, do not break contact with the enemy, and make extensive use of strong mobile forward detachments to seize road junctions and defiles, and to disorganize the enemy march and combat formations."⁴⁶ In most cases, these detachments, referred to as mobile detachments, mobile forward detachments, or forward detachments, were mobile, but not particularly strong. They did, however, perform a rudimentary combat function.

Both rifle forces and tank units formed forward detachments. For example, a 49th Army combat order instructed:

The 194th Rifle Division, attacking in the direction of Gostishevo and Novaia Slobodka, bypassing Vysokinichi from the south, by day's end on 19 December is to seize Nikonovo and Karpovo with its main forces and occupy Novaia Slobodka with its forward detachments. By day's end on 19 December the 30th Rifle Brigade is to seize the line Altukhovo–Durovo–Poznikovo with its main forces and reach Filippovka–Nedeloye–Kudinovo with its forward detachments.⁴⁷

Other rifle forces employed similar techniques. A 9 December 1941 order of the 8th Guards Rifle Division read, "Quickly create in each regiment detachments of 50 men with automatic weapons who are decisive, well-trained Red Army soldiers and commanders. Use them for operations against the enemy rear."⁴⁸ The 18th Separate Rifle

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Brigade of 33d Army employed a forward detachment of ten T-34s and an automatic weapons company to lead its pursuit.⁴⁹

The 30th Army used several tank brigades to exploit offensive success in the Klin region. During the pursuit, the 8th, 24th, and 31st Tank Brigades, operating as small mobile groups, formed forward detachments to lead their advance and secure key terrain features to their front. Colonel A. Kravchenko's 31st Tank Brigade formed a forward detachment of one KV tank, three T-34 tanks, one BT tank, and an automatic weapons platoon of the 31st Rifle Brigade. Colonel V. Zelinsky's 24th Tank Brigade's detachment consisted of four T-34 tanks and troops from the 64th Naval Infantry Brigade.⁵⁰ These and other detachments, although small, contributed immeasurably to the slow but steady advance of the embryonic mobile groups.

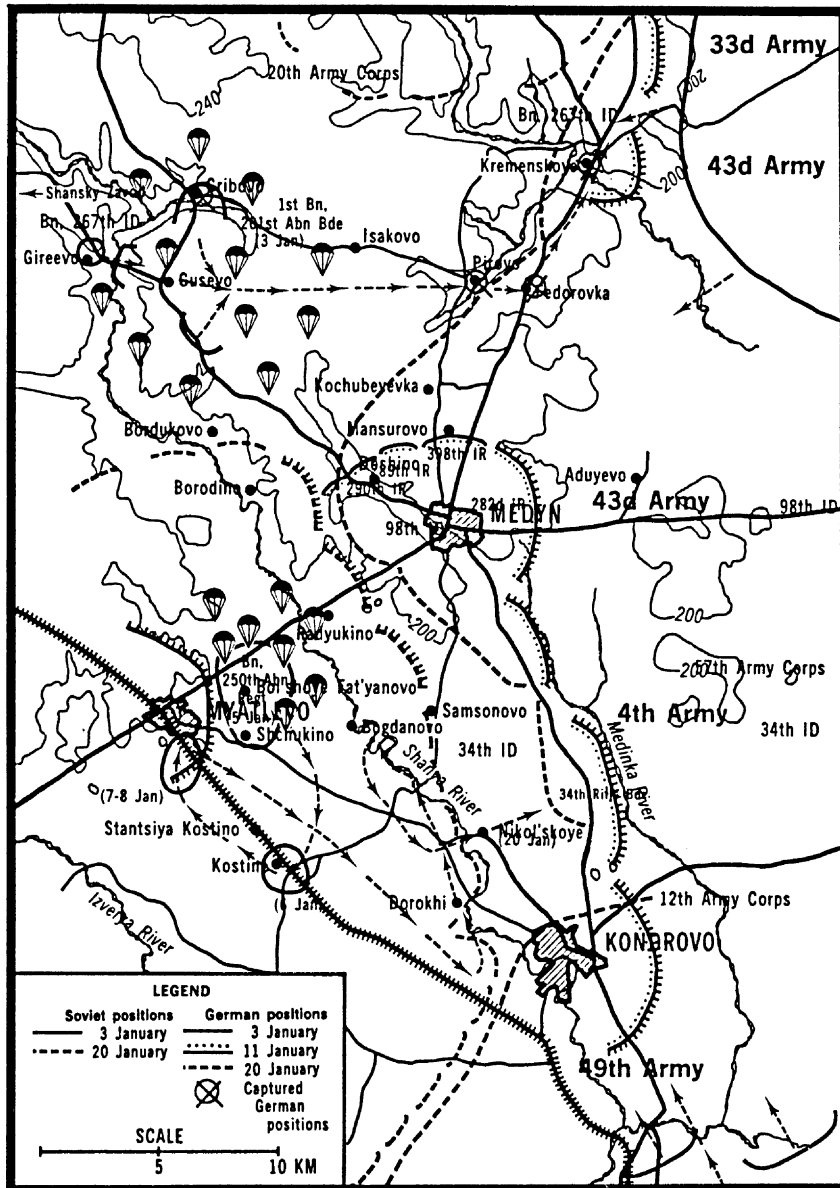
On occasion, forward detachments assisted in encircling German forces or rendering German defenses untenable. On 13 January 1942 a forward detachment of 5th Airborne Corps, dropped in the enemy rear, cut a key road southeast of Medyn and effectively encircled the German garrison (Figure 27).⁵¹

In addition to widespread Soviet attempts to employ forward detachments offensively, before the counteroffensive began Soviet forces had used such detachments in a defensive context, generally to delay the German advance. Elements of the Podol'sk Infantry School conducted a delay with a forward detachment near Iukhnov in October.⁵² In November, near Klin, 8th Tank Brigade similarly used a forward detachment to delay the German advance.⁵³ Other examples exist across the expanse of the Eastern Front.

These small mobile subunits, formed around a nucleus of armor, hindered systematic enemy withdrawal and prevented German occupation of advantageous intermediate lines. However, the limited size and composition of operational and tactical maneuver forces alike prevented them from having an even more significant impact. The mobile groups saw their fire support erode, for tank brigades, artillery, and rifle units could not keep up with the cavalry and ski units. Ultimately, they found themselves in the rear unable to do more than hold the often wooded and swampy terrain.

The forward detachments of armies and rifle divisions and brigades added depths of four to nine kilometers to their combat missions. At times, detachments operated 20–25 kilometers ahead of the main army forces, whose missions ranged to average depths of 16 kilometers.⁵⁴ The limited strength and mobility of the forward detachments forced them to operate close to the main force, in particular in difficult terrain. Those that did not were often destroyed or heavily damaged.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



27. 5th Airborne Corps at Medyn, December 1941

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

During the period of the Moscow counteroffensive, rifle division or brigade forward detachments consisted of from a company to a battalion of rifle forces reinforced with heavy machine guns, antitank guns (up to a battery), and up to a company of 82mm mortars. Although some traveled by truck, cart, skis, or sleigh, most advanced on foot. Forward detachments of armies and tank units were stronger. Armies sometimes employed up to a brigade of tanks though this was rare. Normally, a tank brigade formed a forward detachment around a tank company reinforced with machine guns. These companies, however, seldom numbered more than 10–15 tanks.

The Moscow experiences indicated what could be done with both mobile groups and forward detachments once better equipped and larger forces were available and once commanders honed their skill in employing them. It appeared that properly constituted forward detachments could play a positive role, particularly in the pursuit when they could harass and hinder enemy withdrawal and pre-empt his establishment of new defenses to the rear.

After the Moscow operations, opportunities for the Soviets to employ mobile groups and forward detachments before November 1942 were limited because of the wholesale failure of Soviet offensive efforts in the spring at Khar'kov and Kerch and because of the subsequent Soviet decision to conduct a strategic defense in the summer of 1942. Thereafter, with the initiative in German hands, the Soviets were restricted to conducting counteroffensives to thwart or slow the ensuing German advance.

The Soviets made great strides in 1942 in forming large forces, which they hoped could perform sustained operational maneuver in the service of *front* and army commanders. In the spring they created new tank corps of brigade composition designated to spearhead offensive operations, in particular operational exploitations.⁵⁵ In June the High Command created four tank armies consisting of multiple tank corps, cavalry corps, rifle divisions, and separate tank brigades.⁵⁶ This complex, but difficult to control formation was designed to serve as a mobile group for the *front* commander. Finally, in September 1942, the Soviets created mechanized corps, combined arms versions of the tank corps, with a strong tank element and a large contingent of truck mounted infantry to accompany and protect the tanks.⁵⁷

Initial combat use of this force was inauspicious, particularly regarding their ability to maneuver successfully – either operationally or tactically. Near Khar'kov in May 1942 the Soviets committed two new tank corps to combat in an operation designed to encircle German Sixth Army at Khar'kov. After the start of operations, Soviet commanders

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

procrastinated for six days regarding when to commit the tank corps to combat. When committed, there is no evidence that the corps employed forward detachments. Rather, they advanced in two echelons of brigades through the rifle forces, which were struggling to enlarge the penetration. The same day, a German counterstrike began which soon encircled and destroyed the entire Soviet force. Within weeks German Operation "Blau," which would ultimately climax at Stalin-grad, commenced.

While German forces thrust across southern Russia, the Soviets employed their new tank armies both to slow the German advance and against German forces elsewhere on the front to distract German forces from the south. On 6 July newly formed Soviet 5th Tank Army (7th, 1st, 16th Tank Corps) struck at the flank of advancing German forces northwest of Voronezh.⁵⁸ Lacking both the skill and the time to organize the attack properly, the army commander, Major General A. I. Liziukov, committed his corps in column formation with two battalions serving as advance units for each corps. The advance battalions did most of the fighting, since German aviation halted the forward movement of the corps' main forces. The battalions suffered heavy losses, and subsequent piecemeal engagement of other tank corps elements achieved no success. Soviet analysts insisted it would have been better had Liziukov committed four to five tank brigades simultaneously across a 12–15 kilometer front. The 5th Tank Army broke off battle on 8 July and was shortly abolished.

The 3d Tank Army experienced similar discomfort as it took part in a Western Front operation near Kozel'sk in August 1942.⁵⁹ The three tank corps of the army were to deploy and exploit the success of 16th and 61st Armies. Rifle divisions would penetrate German defenses and, thereafter, the tank corps would enter battle and exploit. When combat began, the rifle divisions made only limited progress because of a lack of support. When the tank corps finally received orders to advance, two did so on entirely new directions. In general, the advance was chaotic. A Soviet assessment noted:

Having received their new assignment, the tank brigades hurriedly moved forward without any preliminary organization of a route reconnaissance and, as a result, stumbled on mine fields, swampy sectors of the front and, naturally, lagged behind the infantry ...⁶⁰

Throughout the attack mutual support was lacking, and Soviet tank forces relied on infantry to provide reconnaissance and security. The existence of rifle forces in tank armies caused the army commanders to

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

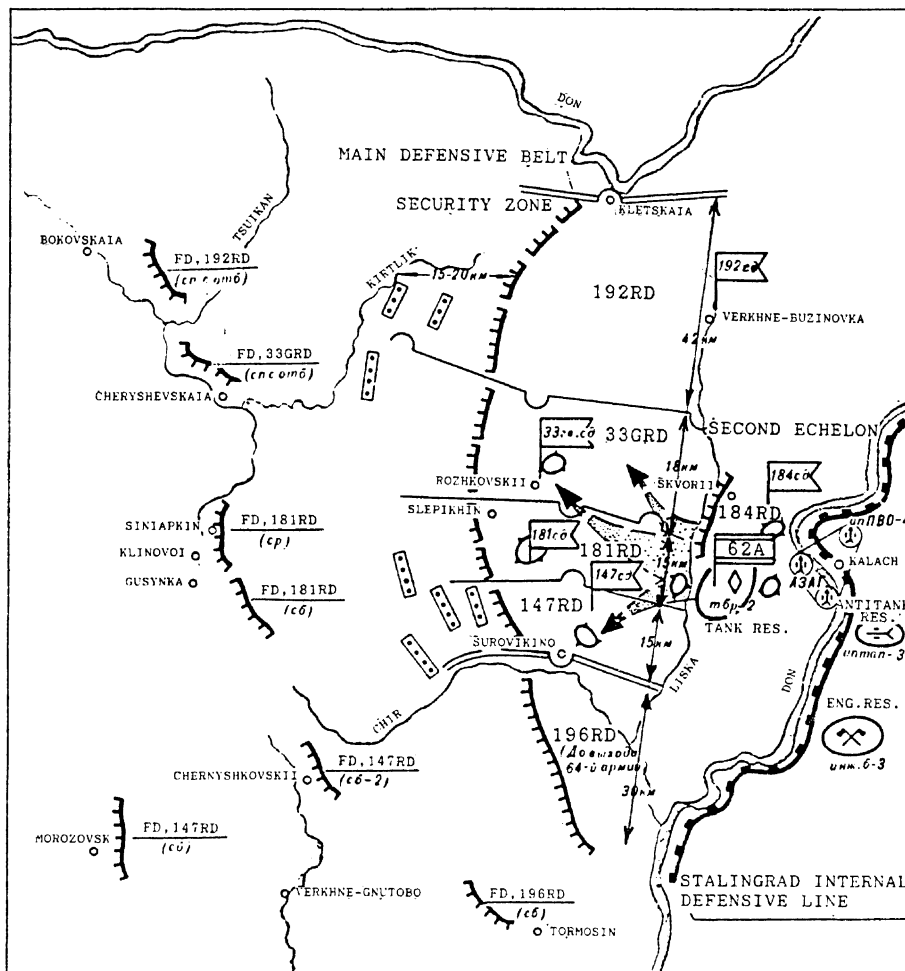
neglect the use of reconnaissance means, security elements, or forward detachments. The experiences of Voronezh and Kozel'sk indicated the problem had to be remedied.

Largely through misfortune, the Soviets amassed considerable experience with the use (or misuse) of offensive maneuver in the summer of 1942. In late fall they did likewise in a defensive context as German forces approached and fought for Stalingrad. As the Soviets set up defenses west of the Don River on the distant approaches to Stalingrad, they dispatched forward detachments further west to occupy delaying positions along the Chir and Tsimla Rivers. The 62d and 64th Army commanders ordered division commanders "to send up to ten forward detachments of a strength of from company to battalion forward a distance of 15–20 kilometers."⁶¹ But this force was clearly insufficient for clarifying the grouping and intentions of the enemy. Therefore, the Military Soviet of the Stalingrad Front, fulfilling STAVKA orders, intended to send out additional strong forward detachments formed from Stalingrad and North Caucasus military schools. Since this was infeasible, only the division forward detachments were deployed forward. However, on order of the *front* commander, these were made significantly stronger.

Ultimately each defending army deployed forward as forward detachments three rifle regiments, reinforced by tanks (up to a battalion), an artillery battalion, and sappers (Figure 28). Each forward detachment had orders to hold a key position along the river lines, detect enemy disposition and intentions, and delay the enemy advance to assist main force deployment. The detachments fought for seven days (18–24 July). As a result, the Germans concluded that Soviet defenses had been reinforced, and they themselves regrouped to strengthen German Sixth Army. This markedly slowed German progress and provided time necessary to strengthen defenses for the decisive battles in and around the city of Stalingrad. A later Soviet assessment read:

Assessing the actions of forward detachments, one can reach the following conclusions. In the complex situation, when 61st and 64th Armies were moving to occupy defensive positions to meet the attacking Germans, the decision to send out forward detachments was, undoubtedly, correct. But the lateness of their dispatch and the great distance of their positions (40–60 kms) led to the enemy reaching the Chir and Tsimla Rivers earlier than the forward detachments. Separated from their [main] forces, they conducted battle without the support of the division or army

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



28. Soviet defenses on the distant approaches to Stalingrad, July 1942

main forces which did not permit them to fully realize their missions.⁶²

By the fall, the Soviet High Command had studied war experience sufficiently to be able to issue new orders and revise older regulations in

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

order to remedy combat problems. Order No. 325 of the People's Commissariat of Defense specifically addressed the use of the new tank and mechanized forces. After cataloging the problems of tank forces, the order specified corrective measures including the requirement to use the new large units as single entities and a prohibition on their piecemeal use. The order mandated cooperation between infantry and infantry support tank regiments and brigades, specified use of tank corps as army or *front* mobile groups, and ordered tank corps to destroy enemy infantry and not enemy tanks. It assigned mechanized brigades the mission of "securing crossings, defiles, and important road junctions in the enemy rear" and cooperating in encircling and destroying the enemy. Mechanized corps were ordered to exploit tactical success into the operational realm.⁶³

Although the new order required each mobile brigade to lead its movement to contact with reconnaissance and security elements, it did not specifically mention use of forward detachments. It did, however, state that mechanized corps' main force columns should deploy forward tank regiments of the mechanized corps or motorized rifle battalions as lead combat elements.

The 1942 *Field Regulation* echoed these concerns for reconnaissance and security well forward and added it was necessary to "protect the entry of mobile formations into the penetration by clearing and holding routes, by organizing artillery support and smoke covers, and by promptly dispatching forward detachments to capture tactical features and crossings along movement routes leading to the penetration."⁶⁴ In addition, the new *Red Army Tactical Manual* (squad through regiment) enjoined regiments to create strong advance guards and all round security. The advance guard was to be of at least reinforced battalion strength.

Changes in force structure and equipment levels by the fall of 1942 made it possible for all formations, mobile and rifle alike, to create stronger forward detachments. These detachments, according to new orders and regulations, would perform critical missions both during the penetration of enemy positions deep in the tactical defense zone and by securing objectives that would facilitate Soviet exploitation and pursuit.

With new guidance and new forces, the Soviets would further their experience with forward detachments in the new period of offensive action commencing at Stalingrad on 19 November 1942.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The Second Period

This period, which commenced on 19 November 1942 with the beginning of the Soviet Stalingrad counteroffensive, was one of marked transition from the bleak experiences of 1941 and 1942 to the steady string of ever more important victories which accrued to the Soviets in 1944 and 1945. It was a period during which the Soviets successively tested two new mobile force structures developed to restore a capability for engaging in mobile warfare. Early in the period, the Soviets, for the first time, encircled and destroyed a large German force to the astonishment of the world, if not themselves. By the end of the period, the Soviets had defeated three out of four German Army Groups; and ultimate victory was no longer in doubt. The period of just over a year was characterized by major redefinition and refinement of Soviet military art and by the wholesale restructuring of the Red Army to implement successfully the new combat techniques.

The second period of war consisted of two distinct phases: the first lasting from 19 November 1942 to 23 March 1943, and the second from 5 July 1943 to the end of the year. The first five months witnessed the major Soviet strategic victory at Stalingrad, followed by four months of nearly continuous Soviet offensive successes in southern Russia. In the last month, the Germans took advantage of Soviet over-optimism and exhaustion to inflict a severe reverse on Soviet forces and restore stability once again to the front. Over the duration of this phase, the Soviets used the mobile force structure developed in 1942, the old style tank armies, and tank and mechanized corps, to spearhead deep operations. Throughout the five months, the Soviets made continuous improvements in command and control, troop organization, cooperation, and logistical support to find that combination of forces and techniques which could produce lasting results. This extensive testing occurred in a systematic manner, for the first time using a system created in November 1942 to collect, analyze, and exploit war experiences. As a result of this analysis, forward detachments became a mandatory part of the march formation of mobile forces. Despite the impressive progress, it was not enough to stave off the temporary reverses of February and March 1943.

The second phase commenced on 5 July 1943 as German forces undertook their third and last strategic offensive effort in the East, at Kursk, an effort which, to their own and others' amazement, faltered in the tactical and close operational depths of Soviet defenses. For the first time in the war, the Soviets had planned and executed a strategic

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

defense which incorporated within it major counteroffensives which they intended to expand into a general offensive extending the entire breadth of the Eastern Front.

The short but violent German operation at Kursk faltered only to face major Soviet counterstrokes which, by the end of August, had set the entire front aflame. By September German armies were in retreat from the Valdai Hills to the Black Sea, a retreat which by November swept German forces back to the Pronja and Dnepr River lines. By year's end, and the end of the period, Soviet forces had penetrated into eastern Belorussia and across the Dnepr River in several broad sectors, in so doing threatening the viability of the entire German position in the East.

During the second phase, the Soviets committed a new refined mobile force structure to battle, one specifically tailored to conduct both operational and tactical maneuver within appropriate levels of command. It was a structure which would endure to war's end and provide a model for the post-war Soviet Army force structure as well. In this second phase, Soviet operational and tactical techniques improved, particularly regarding operational and tactical maneuver. During the second period of war, both the concepts and forces designated to conduct operational maneuver (the mobile groups) and those designated for tactical maneuver (forward detachments) experienced their most remarkable and substantial development during the entire war. Systematic effective use of mobile groups and forward detachments became a rule rather than an exception. Their most remarkable period of employment would follow in 1944 and 1945.

On 19 November 1942 the Soviets launched Operation "Uran," designed to drive German forces from the Stalingrad region. Large operational maneuver forces, in the form of one tank army and four mobile tank and mechanized corps, served as mobile groups of attacking *fronts* and armies. Within ten days German Sixth and part of Fourth Panzer Army were encircled around Stalingrad. Thereafter, in December, German forces mounted relief attempts toward Stalingrad while, simultaneously, the Soviets expanded their offensive by conducting operations to clear German and allied forces from the middle reaches of the Don and the lower Don region east of Rostov. Again, multiple tank and mechanized corps spearheaded the exploitation. By late December German attempts to relieve the Stalingrad garrison had failed, and now their principal task was to prevent a collapse of the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front.

Beginning in January, the Soviets mounted a series of single *front* operations against Hungarian and German forces defending along the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

Don north and south of Voronezh. Simultaneously, Soviet forces drove westward toward the Donets Basin (Donbas), the Mius River line, and Rostov on the Don. These operations were also spearheaded by mobile forces, although these forces were increasingly weakened by the extensive duration of continuous warfare.

In late January, as Soviet forces approached the Oskol and Northern Donets Rivers, the High Command prepared two additional operations to drive German forces back through Kursk and Khar'kov to the Dnepr River and, if possible, encircle German Army Group Don forward of the Dnepr. These two operations (Khar'kov and Donbas) also relied heavily on weakened mobile forces to conduct successful deep operations. The Soviet operations developed successfully into mid-February. The Soviets seized Kursk, Belgorod, and Khar'kov and penetrated across the Northern Donets River, creating a huge gap in German defenses and threatening the German rear. All the while, however, time and distance took their toll on Soviet units which became even frailer as they advanced. Exploiting growing Soviet weakness, the Germans organized a counterstroke which, between 20 February and 23 March, crushed overextended Soviet forces and drove them back to the line of the Northern Donets River.

During this frenetic period the Soviets conducted a series of eight *front* or multi-*front* offensive operations as follows:

<i>Operation</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Fronts (Mobile Forces)</i>
Stalingrad	19 Nov. 42– 2 Feb. 43	Southwestern, Don, Stalingrad (5th TA [1st, 2d GTC]; 4th, 16th, 13th TC; 4th MC)
Middle Don	16–28 Dec. 42	Southwestern (17th, 18th, 24th, 25th TC; 1st GMC)
Kotel'nikovskiy	12–30 Dec. 42	Stalingrad (7th, 13th TC; 6th, 2d G. 3d GMC)
Ostrogzhsk–Rossosh'	13–27 Jan. 43	Voronezh–Southwestern (3 TA [12th, 15th TC])
Voronezh–Kastornoe	24 Jan.– 2 Feb. 43	Voronezh–Briansk (4th TC)
Rostov	1 Jan.– 10 Feb. 43	Southern–North Caucasus (3d GTC; 2d G, 3d G, 4th G, 5th GMC)
Donbas	29 Jan.– 18 Feb. 43	Southwestern (Mobile Group Popov [3d, 10th, 18th, 4th GTC]; 25th, 1st GTC)

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Khar'kov

2 Feb.—
3 March 43

Voronezh
(3d TA [12th, 15th TC];
5th GTC)

Although all Soviet *fronts* employed operational maneuver forces under either *front* or army control, the combat configuration of those forces varied; and only a few mobile forces employed forward detachments to conduct tactical maneuver. Tank armies relied on their rifle divisions to perform the reconnaissance and security function and only formed forward detachments to satisfy special combat requirements. Tank and mechanized corps led their advance with a variety of advance guards, reinforced reconnaissance units, and, on some occasions, forward detachments. Rifle units, as before, used small forward detachments primarily in pursuit phases of the operation. Thus the period was one of experimentation with mobile concepts, and the results of that experimentation were varied.

At the end of the long string of offensive operations, in March and April 1943, the Soviet High Command and General Staff looked closely at these combat experiences, derived lessons from them, and used those lessons as a basis for new orders governing the planning and conduct of offensive operations. Much of that analysis involved the conduct of operational and tactical maneuver, specifically operations by mobile groups and forward detachments. In that regard, there were experiences throughout the winter which argued for more systematic use of forward detachments, particularly in mobile forces.

In the Stalingrad operation, 5th Tank Army launched the main Soviet assault northwest of Stalingrad.⁶⁵ After penetrating Rumanian defenses with rifle divisions, it committed its 1st and 26th Tank Corps to exploit and link up with other Soviet mobile forces (4th Mechanized Corps) exploiting from positions south of Stalingrad. The two tank corps began the exploitation formed in multiple brigade columns, each column preceded by light reconnaissance units and movement protection detachments (Figure 29). The weakness of these lead elements slowed the advance of both corps; 26th Tank Corps drove slowly into the enemy rear, but 1st Tank Corps was delayed several days overcoming small enemy units in its path. On 27 November, when 26th Tank Corps reached Ostrov, about 20 kilometers from Kalach on the Don, the corps commander decided to employ a night attack by a specially formed forward detachment to seize key crossing sites over the Don at Kalach. A Soviet afteraction report described the action:

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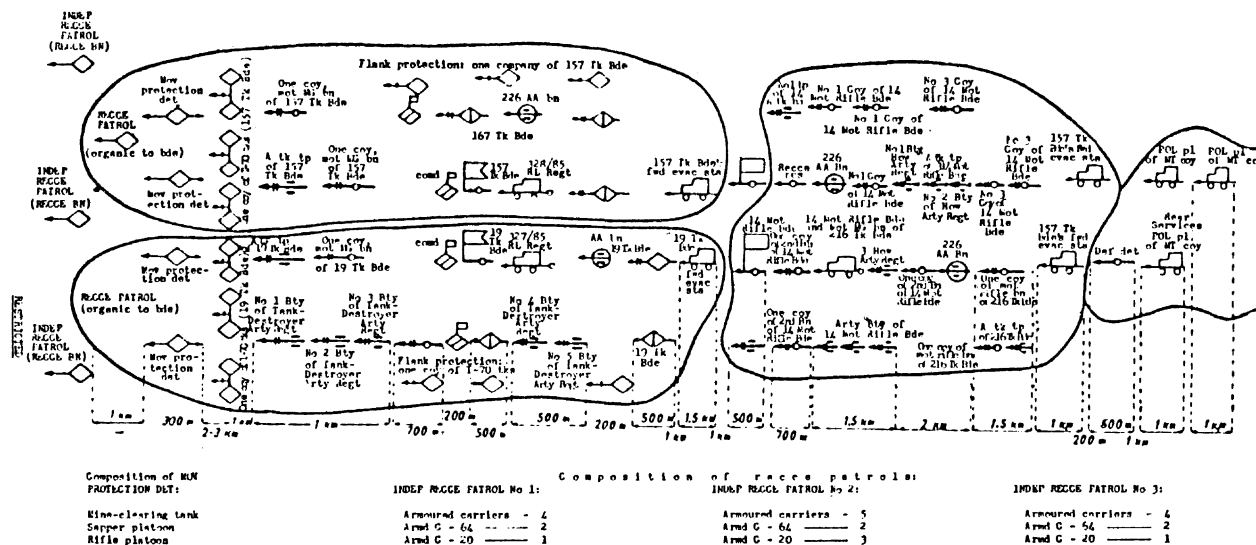


Diagram 6. Battle disposition of the 1 Guards "DOG" Tank Corps at the time of its commitment to the breakthrough.

29. March formation of 1st Tank Corps, November 1942

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Having occupied the Ostrov region on the night of 22 November, the corps commander decided to exploit the darkness of night to seize crossing sites over the Don River by surprise, for which he sent out a forward detachment under command of the commander of the 14th Motorized Rifle Brigade, Lt. Col. N. Filippov, consisting of two motorized rifle companies, five tanks of the 157th Tank Brigade, and armored vehicles of the 15th Reconnaissance Battalion.

The forward detachment, having penetrated deep into enemy dispositions with headlights blazing, approached the crossing. The cunningness succeeded – the column was accepted by the Germans as one of its own; and, unimpeded, it approached the crossing. Having destroyed German security units at the crossing, the detachment secured the crossing and organized a defense just as the corps' main force battled for positions at Sovkhoz "October Victory," where the enemy, operating in a previously prepared antitank region, rendered stiff opposition.

The forward detachment tried to secure Kalach town from the march but, having met heavy opposition, returned to the defended crossing site and conducted battle in encirclement until the arrival of the main force. Thus, thanks to the successful use of cunning and decisive action, the crossing over the Don was secured and defended, thus considerably easing further action to seize Kalach.⁶⁶

Further south, 4th Mechanized Corps designated forward detachments early in the operation; but, although the reason for doing so was valid, the detachments were too weak to affect the outcome of combat. In addition, during the pursuit phase of the Stalingrad operation, rifle divisions routinely employed forward detachments, usually in battalion strength.

On 16 December Soviet forces of the Southwestern Front began the Middle Don operation against Italian Eighth Army and German forces defending the salient formed by the Don and upper Chir Rivers.⁶⁷ Four tank corps (17th, 18th, 24th, and 25th) were to exploit southward along parallel routes from a bridgehead at Verkhnyi Mamont toward the main German supply lines running through Tatsinskaia and Morozovsk, 100 kilometers to the south. A mechanized corps (1st Guards) would simultaneously strike westward across the Chir River to link up with the main armored force.

The four tank corps led their commitment with small reconnaissance

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

elements and a forward detachment for each first echelon brigade. Although initial reconnaissance was poor, and the lead corps lost up to 50 tanks to undiscovered minefields, subsequent operations demonstrated the utility of the forward detachments. The 17th Tank Corps' two detachments consisted of from a company to a battalion of tanks reinforced by a rifle company and engineer elements. Later, 17th Tank Corps employed forward detachments to lead its march southwest as it formed a protective outer screen for main force operations. The 24th Tank Corps, operating deep in the German rear, also employed forward detachments to spearhead its seizure of the major German supply base and airfield at Tatsinskaia. Soviet tanks and mechanized corps employed similar forward detachments in the Kotel'nikovskiy and, later, the Rostov operations.

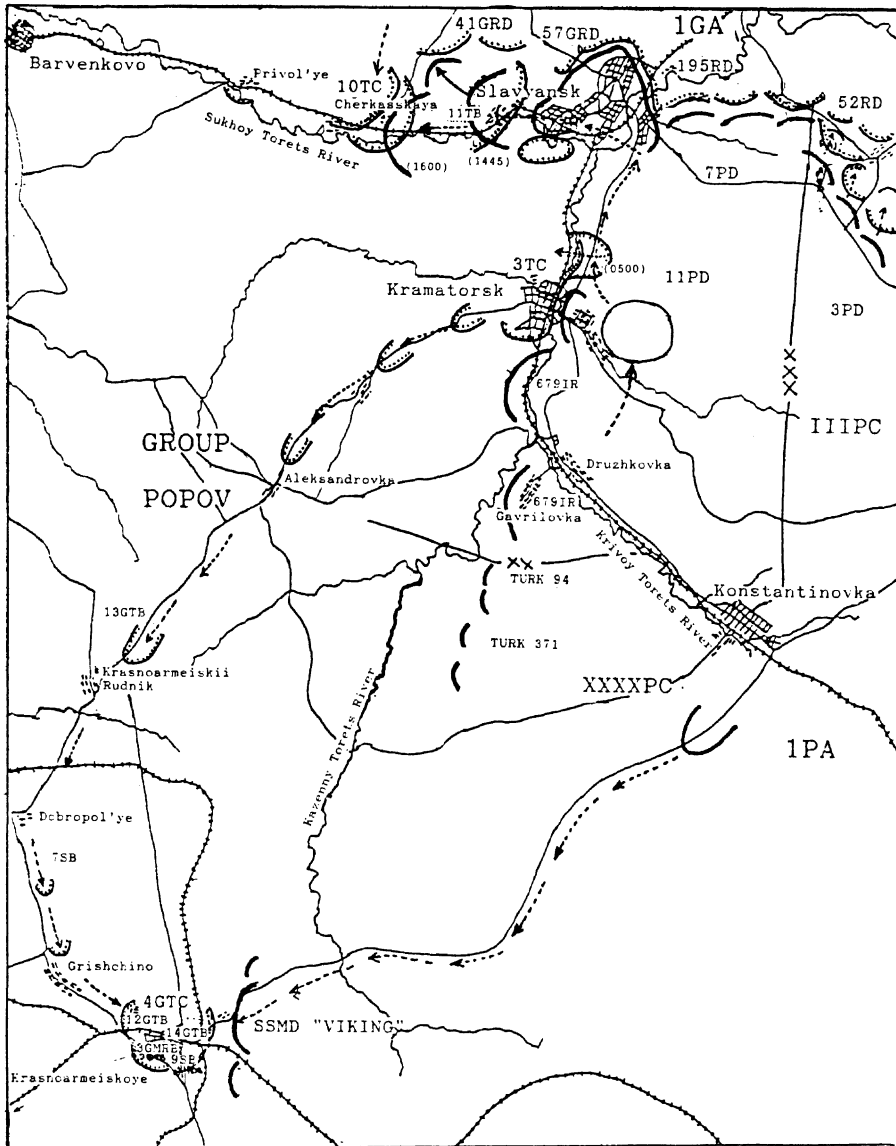
The 3d Tank Army, the principal Soviet mobile force in the Ostrogozhsk–Rossosh' and Khar'kov operations, relied on its rifle divisions to lead its penetration operations.⁶⁸ Thereafter, its tank corps (12th and 15th) employed forward detachments on occasion during pursuit operations (the 195th Tank Brigade led 15th Tank Corps' race to the Northern Donets River). By late January and early February, however, the army's declining armored strength prevented creation of separate units to conduct forward combat.

In the Donbas operation, for the first time, the Soviet Southwestern Front created a *front* mobile group, named Group Popov, which consisted of four understrength tank corps (3d, 10th, 18th, and 4th Guards), each paired with a rifle division mounted on trucks.⁶⁹ Again, use of forward detachments was not uniform. Because the corps were understrength, most concentrated their strength in a single brigade and employed a small forward detachment to spearhead operations. Since the tank corps operations quickly became fragmented and most of the corps became involved in direct battle with German infantry and armor units, the weak detachments were of little use.

Again, 4th Guards Tank Corps (formerly 17th) used the detachments most effectively.⁷⁰ On the night of 11 February, the corps conducted a 60 kilometer secret night march from Kramatorsk to Krasnoarmeiskaia in the German rear, using one of its tank brigades (14th Guards) as a forward detachment (Figure 30). Although the pre-emptive maneuver succeeded and caused German Army Group Don considerable consternation, ultimately the daring operation was negated by the ensuing major German counterattack which drove Soviet forces back to the Northern Donets River.

The Soviets reached several conclusions regarding operations in the winter of 1942–43. First, the operations confirmed the utility of success-

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



30. 4th Guards Tank Corps advance to Krasnoarmeiskaia, 11 February 1943

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

ful operational and tactical maneuver. Second, Soviet forces seeking to maneuver achieved only mixed success. Where mobile groups and forward detachments were strong and operated in close coordination with other forces, their use yielded success. Conversely, if hastily formed and improperly structured, their impact was minimal. Third, forward detachments (and mobile groups) when used properly, produced higher rates of advance for both mobile and rifle forces. The problem was how to institutionalize their use by forming forward detachments (mobile groups) which could sustain operations and by developing concepts for their proper use. This was the task the General Staff set about accomplishing when it analyzed winter experiences in the spring of 1943.

Soviet analyses of forward detachment operations concluded:

Depending on the situation, following the corps commitment to the penetration, when it is necessary to seize a certain line in order to safeguard the corps' concentration or deployment, an advantage may be gained by having, within the first echelon, motorized infantry reinforced by artillery and tanks. In actual practice, these purposes were served by specially formed mobile groups (in fact, forward detachments), as for example, in the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps during the Stalingrad operation. While the mechanized corps was in action, it appears that these forward detachments were not very effective because the corps had to complete the penetration entirely on its own. In principle, however, their function was supposed to be the seizure of isolated strong points and crossings in front of the main force on the line of advance of the tank corps, and they were formed early during the preparatory stage of the operation.⁷¹

The analysis then pinpointed the most productive use of forward detachments, stating:

The forming of forward detachments by 4th Guards Mechanized Corps is worthy of attention. But it should be emphasized that these mobile groups are capable of successful action only after the tactical depth of enemy defenses had been penetrated by the corps. They may be used for seizing isolated strong points in the enemy rear, crossings, or lines offering advantageous positions for the corps deployment.⁷²

To reinforce this point, Soviet analysts cited the Kalach example of 1st Guards (16th) Tank Corps. Regarding the pursuit phase of operations, the Soviets concluded:

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Wide use may be made of mobile groups (in essence forward detachments) in the pursuit of a withdrawing enemy, when a small but highly mobile detachment, moving much faster than the main force, might be capable of forestalling the enemy by seizing defiles in the path of his withdrawal and to immobilize for a time his retreating columns.⁷³

The assessment added that during each stage of fighting, the tank and mechanized corps' march and combat formations had to be structured to meet existing conditions (Figure 31). In general, they recommended that such corps lead operations with strong reconnaissance and security elements, citing:

In 4th Kantemirovka Guards Tank Corps the overall depth of its combat security elements covered from 17–20 kilometers, and every first echelon brigade had a forward detachment preceding it. But even in this case, they were moving only a short distance ahead of the main force. It is only natural that, due to such a short advance of the combat security elements, there was no guarantee that the corps commander would have at his disposal enough time to maneuver the main force columns in an emergency because these were literally treading on the tails of the combat security elements.⁷⁴

Consequently, Soviet analysts recommended corps employ reconnaissance and security elements such that:

A short distance behind the reconnaissance will follow the forward detachments with traffic control service subunits [OOD] at the head of their columns. It is the duty of the forward detachment commanders to make certain that the preparedness of this march route, up to the line at which the tanks are supposed to overtake the infantry, has been thoroughly checked and, if necessary, to organize traffic controls on detours bypassing isolated enemy centers of resistance, assigning this duty to movement control detachments.⁷⁵

The Soviets allowed that, on special occasions, reinforced reconnaissance elements could perform the same function. The assessment further recommended, "The task of the forward detachment for the first day of operations would be the seizure of positions required for the concentration of main forces and for resumption of movement at dawn next morning."⁷⁶

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

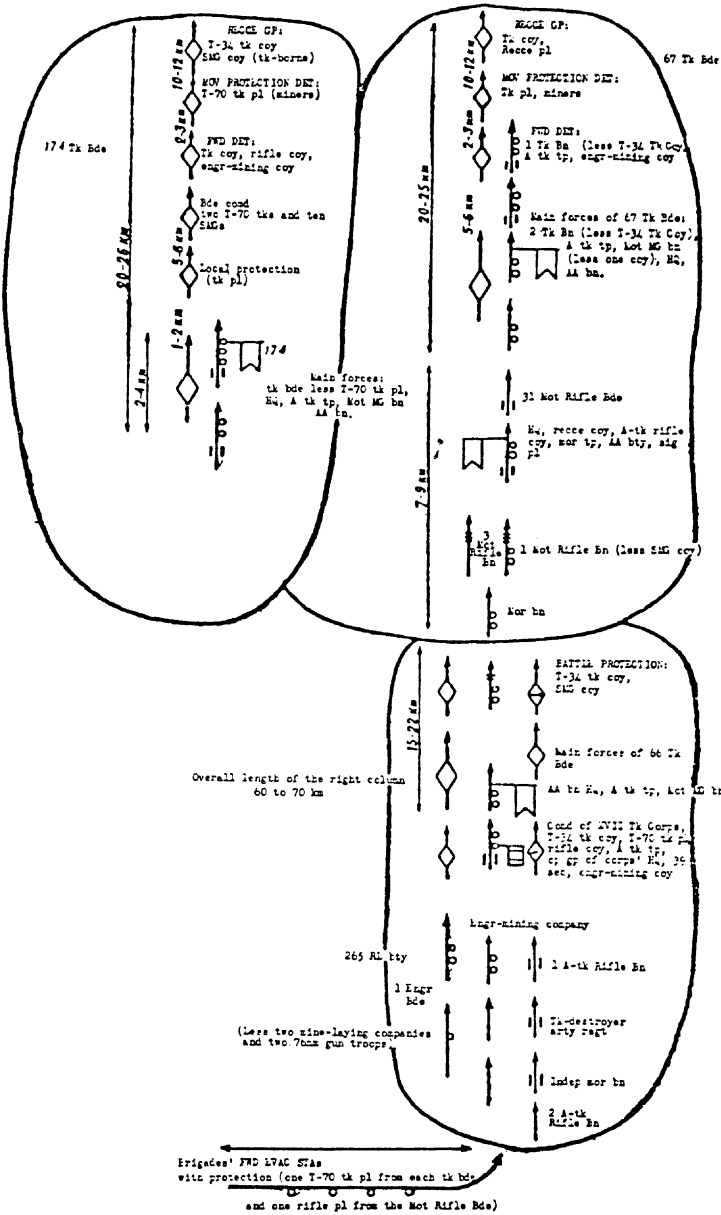


Diagram 7. Battle disposition of the IV Guards "KANTAKUNYA" Tank Corps at the time of its commitment to the breakthrough, on the 16th of December, 1942.

31. March formation of 17th (4th Guards) Tank Corps, 16 December 1942

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Soviet analysts reflected back on regulations of the 1930s to recommend employment of a vertical dimension of tactical maneuver, in the form of air assault (airborne) forces cooperating with forward detachments and mobile groups:

Although the material covering the operations described herein lacks examples of cooperation between tank (mechanized) corps and airborne troops, nonetheless during the widening-the-breach stage, at the time when the fighting acquires the character of a maneuver and the fighting formation of the advancing side moves swiftly forward, it should be considered most expedient to employ airborne infantry on the widest possible scale.

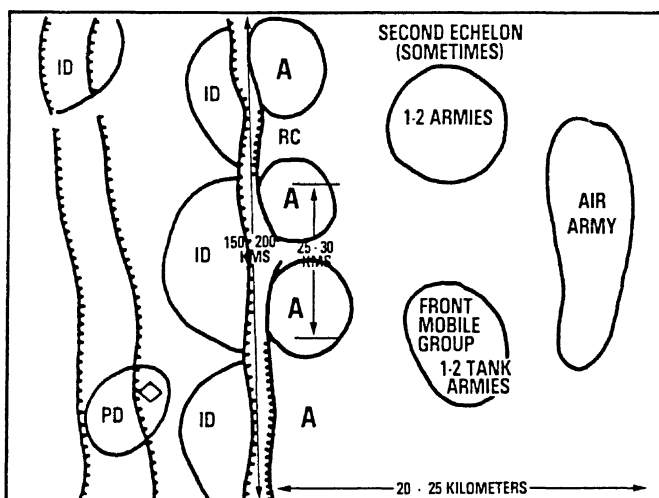
The flow of enemy reserves into the combat area can be stemmed more effectively and for a longer period of time by landings of airborne troops than by the tactical air arms. Upon their landing, airborne troops can seize operationally important points in the rear of the enemy defense zone and convert them into field bases for advancing mobile forces.⁷⁷

Comprehensive Soviet collection and analysis of maneuver experiences during the winter of 1942–43 enabled the High Command to prepare refined concepts and field new forces to conduct mobile warfare. Much of this intense work occurred during the lull in combat which set in from late March to early July 1943. During this period the Soviets formed five new tank armies on the basis of a common TOE and adjusted the composition of existing tank and mechanized corps.⁷⁸ Each force received additional combat and combat service support units to enable it to better sustain deep operations. In addition, a broad array of tank units (battalions, regiments, and brigades) were added to rifle armies both to serve as infantry support armor and to free existing mobile forces for the exploitation role.

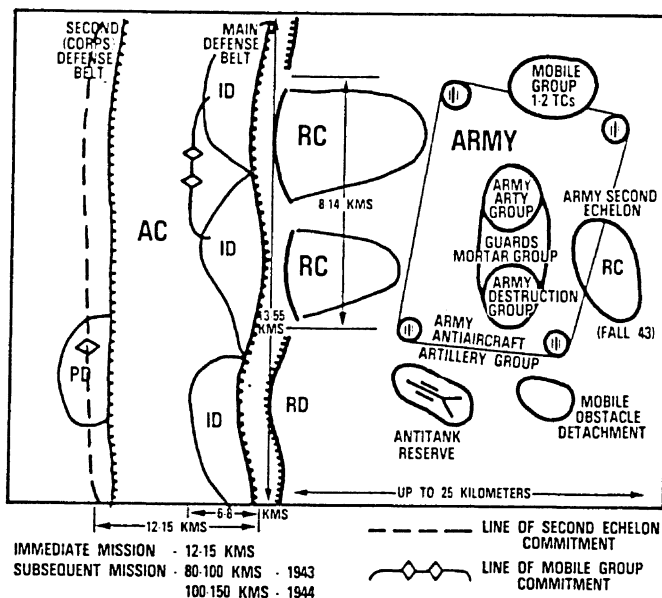
Conceptually, the tank armies and separate mobile corps were to serve as mobile groups for *front* and army commanders, respectively. The latter would commence the operational exploitation while the former would then engage in deep operational maneuver (Figure 32). Within these mobile forces, forward detachments, operating in tandem with reconnaissance units, would perform tactical maneuver to include: lead the march of tank and mechanized corps, initiate meeting engagements by pre-empting defenses and seizing advantageous positions for deployment of the main force, help complete the penetration of enemy rear defenses and lead the exploitation and pursuit, and conduct river crossings. All these were, in fact, traditional missions in previous Soviet theory; and all had been tested in the winter of

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

FRONT OPERATIONAL FORMATION – 1943



ARMY OPERATIONAL FORMATION – 1943-1944



32. Front and army operational formation, Summer 1943

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

1942–43. Now, however, forces were available to convert the theory into practice more systematically.

As had sometimes been the case at Stalingrad and thereafter, rifle formations (division and corps) would also form and employ forward detachments, principally for use in the pursuit phase of operations. Unlike the earlier period, by July 1943 sufficient weaponry was available to outfit more capable forward detachments for use by rifle forces. These detachments, however, still had limited mobility and firepower; hence, their use was restricted to corps and division level.

The new forward detachments, which emerged in the summer of 1943, tended to be larger than their earlier counterparts. Tank and mechanized corps employed reinforced tank, mechanized, or motorized rifle brigades; tank and mechanized brigades sometimes used reinforced battalions; rifle corps used truck-mounted rifle regiments or battalions and, on occasion, separate tank brigades; and rifle divisions employed reinforced companies or battalions. Reinforcements were more extensive and included artillery (later self-propelled artillery), antitank elements, engineers, and reconnaissance elements. Every attempt was made to make the reinforcements as mobile as the nucleus of the unit.

The nature of forward detachment operations reflected closely the nature of operations as a whole. Hence, they were less prominent in the heavy defense fighting of July 1943 but more prominent in the series of penetration operations conducted from late July to late August. They then performed a major role in subsequent pursuit operations in the fall of 1943.

The new concepts and force structure for tactical maneuver did not achieve immediate success. Many procedures had to be refined regarding the conduct of both operational and tactical maneuver. For example, offensive experiences demonstrated that armies could seldom completely penetrate enemy defenses. It was often necessary to use the army mobile group (tank or mechanized corps) or, in some cases, the *front* mobile group (tank army) to complete the penetration. This meant that forward detachments themselves often became involved in heavy fighting for the enemy tactical defenses. Subsequently, both they and their parent mobile groups often began the exploitation in weakened condition.

In addition, the Soviets still had to determine key indices (norms) associated with the use of forward detachments such as: composition, configuration, depth of mission, distance from main forces, number of detachments per force, distance between adjoining detachments, and required logistical support. To make matters more complex, each of

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

these indices depended on the situation and was thus variable. A failure to answer each question correctly could, and did, affect the fate of the forward detachment, and to a lesser extent, that of its parent force. The Soviets would struggle to answer these questions in late summer and fall of 1943. Most would be answered satisfactorily by 1944.

Since Soviet use of forward detachments after July 1943 was ubiquitous at most levels of command, volumes would be required to document their use. Hence, I will concentrate on the problems the Soviets encountered with forward detachments and the remedies they developed to overcome those problems. In addition, I will detail improvements in their use in 1943 and thereafter to war's end.

Action resumed on the Eastern Front on 8 July when German forces struck the northern and southern flanks of the Kursk salient. After a week of intense fighting in which the Germans made negligible to limited gains but at enormous cost in losses, the offensive ground to a halt. Immediately, the Soviets launched their first planned counter-offensive against the German salient around Orel'. After conducting two major diversionary operations to the south, on 3 August two Soviet *fronts* struck German forces on the Belgorod–Khar'kov axis. In the two major counterstrokes the Soviets eventually used all five of their new tank armies and many of their separate tank and mechanized corps. While combat at Orel' evolved into a slugging match against slowly withdrawing German forces, the Soviet tank armies tore a gaping hole in German defenses near Belgorod and advanced over 100 kilometers before being stopped by counterattacks west of Khar'kov. As heavy fighting raged for Khar'kov, Soviet *fronts* struck along most of the Eastern Front.

By early September, under unremitting pressure, German forces began a planned but ultimately precipitous withdrawal to temporary sanctuary behind the Dnepr River. In the "race for the Dnepr" Soviet tank armies, mobile forces, and forward detachments raced ahead to breach the river line before the Germans could fortify its length. Although the Germans successfully erected defenses along most of the river, in numerous sectors Soviet forces won the race and established small bridgeheads which the Germans then had to contain. After over a month of stalemate along the Dnepr River, the Soviets secretly shifted large mobile forces, broke out of a small bridgehead north of Kiev, and created a bridgehead of strategic proportions from which they would commence operations in the winter of 1944.

Forward detachments played an important role in virtually all these operations, either serving mobile or rifle forces, although not without problems. Three examples will suffice to illustrate that use: the

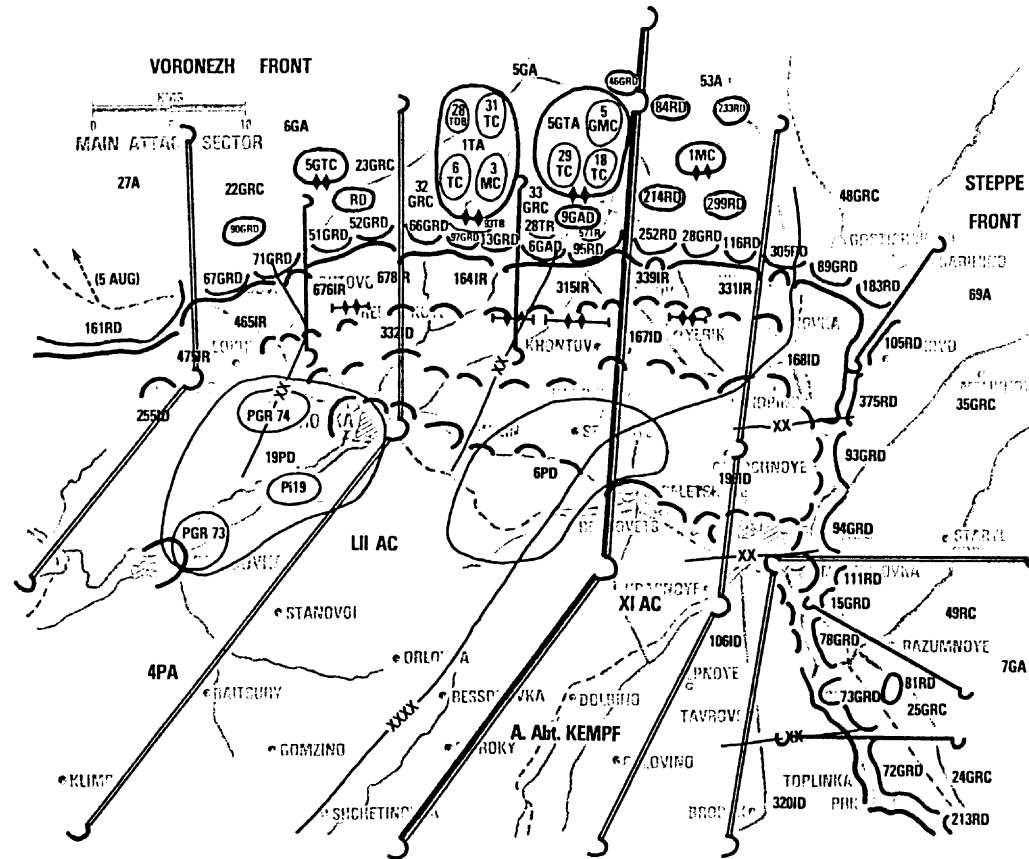
EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

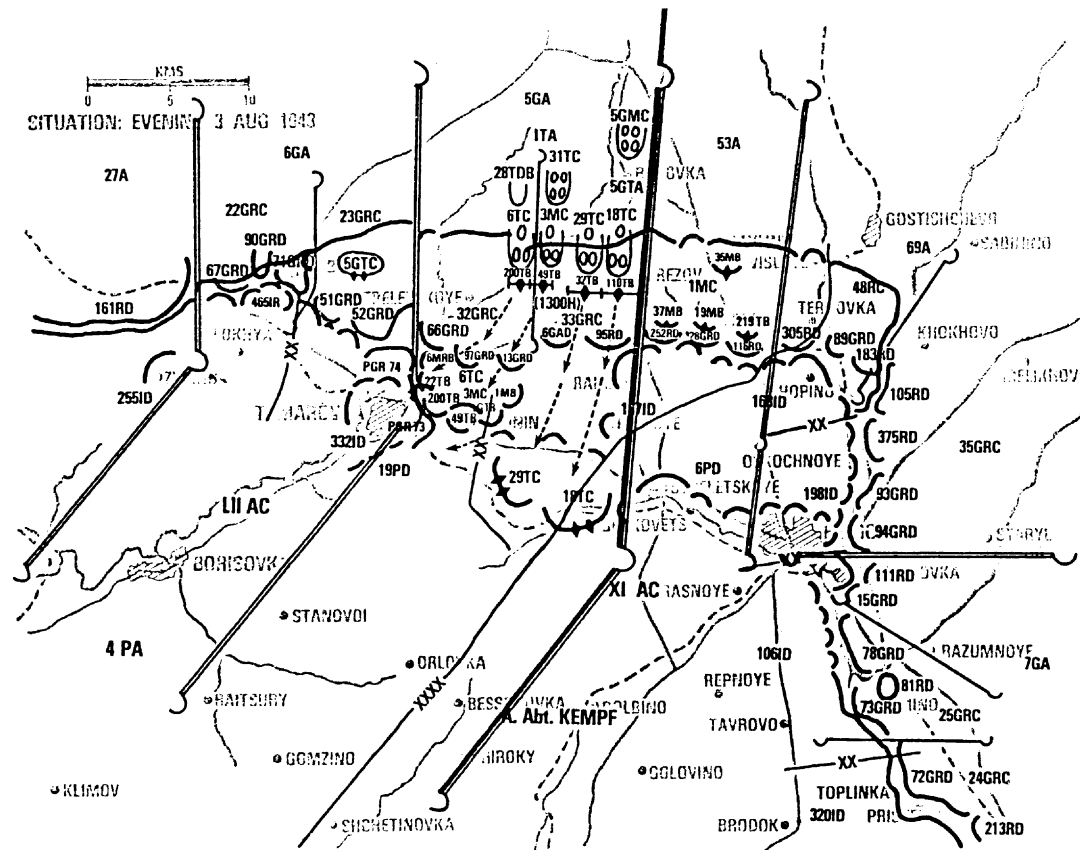
penetration and exploitation at Belgorod–Khar'kov, the "race to the Dnepr," and the breaching of the Dnepr line.

In the Belgorod operation, General N. F. Vatutin, the Voronezh Front commander, penetrated German defenses northwest of Belgorod with two rifle armies (5th Guards and 6th Guards) and then exploited the penetration with two new tank armies (1st and 5th Guards).⁷⁹ The rifle armies attacked at 0755 3 August after an artillery preparation and penetrated to a depth of 12–15 kilometers the first day. After midday the two tank armies joined the attack (Figure 33). The 1st Tank Army advanced in two echelons of corps with 6th Tank and 3d Mechanized Corps leading. Each corps, in turn, formed in two brigade columns with a reinforced tank brigade serving as forward detachment for each mobile corps. In advance of the forward detachments were corps reconnaissance groups of two reinforced tank platoons each and brigade reconnaissance groups of one reinforced tank platoon. The reconnaissance groups followed advancing Soviet infantry to determine the precise locations where the forward detachments and lead brigades could most easily penetrate the defenses of withdrawing German defenders. The forward detachments had orders to overcome enemy positions from the march; overcome remaining German resistance in the, by now, devastated tactical defense zone; and pave the way for exploitation of their parent corps. Behind them, movement security detachments (OOD) of a reinforced sapper company each cleared the route of debris for the main force. On 1st Tank Army's left flank, 5th Guards Tank Army entered combat in similar fashion. The two tank armies, with nearly 1,000 tanks and nearly 8,000 vehicles, advanced to contact, conducted a passage of lines, and began their exploitation on a front of six kilometers.

By 1700 3 August 1st Tank Army's forward detachments had penetrated almost 30 kilometers and had cut the main German lateral communications road linking Fourth Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf (Figure 34). In subsequent fighting over the next three days, the tank armies experienced their first problem: a tendency to become embroiled in combat with defending German forces along their flanks. This distracted the detachments and the tank armies as a whole and eroded their strength. Nevertheless, by 7 August the tank armies had resumed their advance into the operational depths. The 1st Tank Army thrust southwestward toward Bogodukhov, a key German supply base 80 kilometers ahead, with two corps in first echelon, each led by a reinforced tank brigade as forward detachment.

By evening on 7 August, 1st Tank Army forces had seized Bogodukhov, and after desultory fighting for several river lines to the south, on





34. Belgorod-Khar'kov operation: Situation, 2200 3 August 1943

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

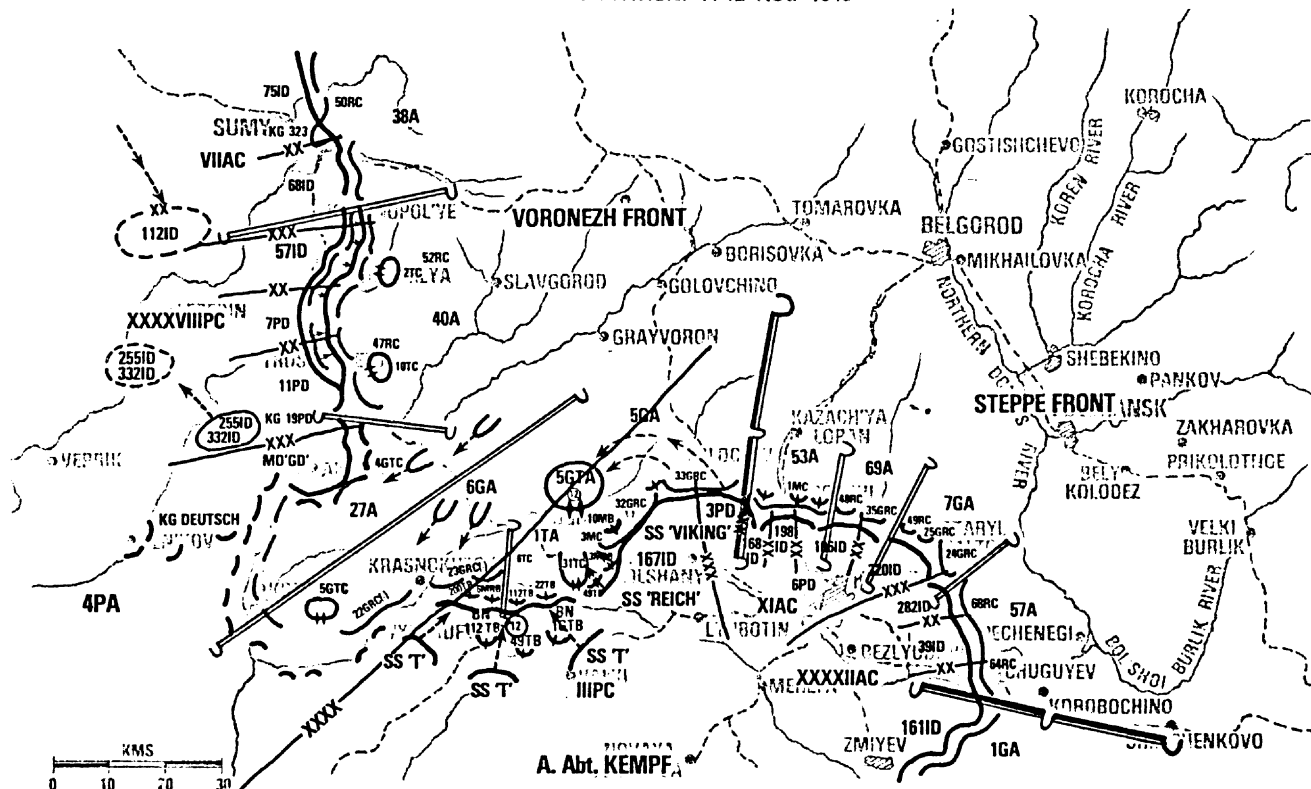
10 August the tank army's three corps dispatched forward detachments south to cut the main rail line running eastward into Khar'kov.⁸⁰ The 31st Tank Corps dispatched an entire tank brigade (112th) which secured the village of Vysokopol'ye; 3d Mechanized Corps' 49th Tank Brigade and 19th Mechanized Brigade sent small detachments to seize two other villages. On 11 August they were joined by 1st Guards Tank Brigade and the 17th Tank Regiment. All occupied defensive positions to block German movements until the arrival of their parent corps, still fighting over 10 kilometers to the rear.

Late on 11 August and the following day, German operational reserves, which had returned to the Khar'kov area from the south, struck the forward detachments and, in heavy fighting, virtually destroyed them (Figures 35–36). Thereafter, German forces turned on 1st Tank Army and, in bloody fighting, brought its advance to a standstill. After ten more days of heavy fighting around and west of Khar'kov, the city finally fell.

The experience of 1st Tank Army typified forward detachment operations in the summer and fall of 1943. The detachments were stronger and more capable of spearheading prolonged advances. In this instance, after initial difficulties caused by threats to their flanks, forward detachments led the advance over 110 kilometers deep. As they did so, the tank army outstripped supporting rifle armies and became vulnerable. The forward detachments operated too far forward and outside the immediate supporting distance of their parent mobile units. The German counterattack destroyed them, in doing so stripping the tank army of about one-third of its armor strength and halting the tank army as well. The forward detachments worked in theory and in practice but only to a point. The Soviets, in the future, had to learn what that point was.

After the fighting around Khar'kov had subsided, other Soviet forces on the Eastern Front joined the offensive; and the ensuing pressure forced the Germans to withdraw to the Dnepr River line. Forward detachments served three purposes during the "race to the Dnepr." Initially, on at least one occasion, a detachment, more properly a mixed detachment, was formed from the remnants of 5th Guards Tank Army. Equipped with about 50 tanks (all that remained of the army after the fighting at Khar'kov), the detachment used communication equipment and codes from the tank army's three corps to simulate a full army and maintain psychological pressure on the Germans.⁸¹ This early use of a forward detachment for deceptive purposes would be repeated later in the war.

Forward detachments also led the advance of Soviet forces toward



35. Belgorod–Khar'kov operation: Situation, 11–12 August 1943

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

140

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

the Dnepr River. Often, as in the case of 3d Guards Tank Army, these detachments reached the river in advance of withdrawing German forces and were able to secure small bridgeheads over the river. On 19 September General Rybalko's 3d Guards Tank Army assembled at Romny, west of Khar'kov.⁸² General Vatutin, the Voronezh Front commander, ordered Rybalko to move his army into the gap on the left flank of German forces withdrawing from the Poltava area and exploit through the gap 250 kilometers to the Dnepr by 22 September. Rybalko decided:

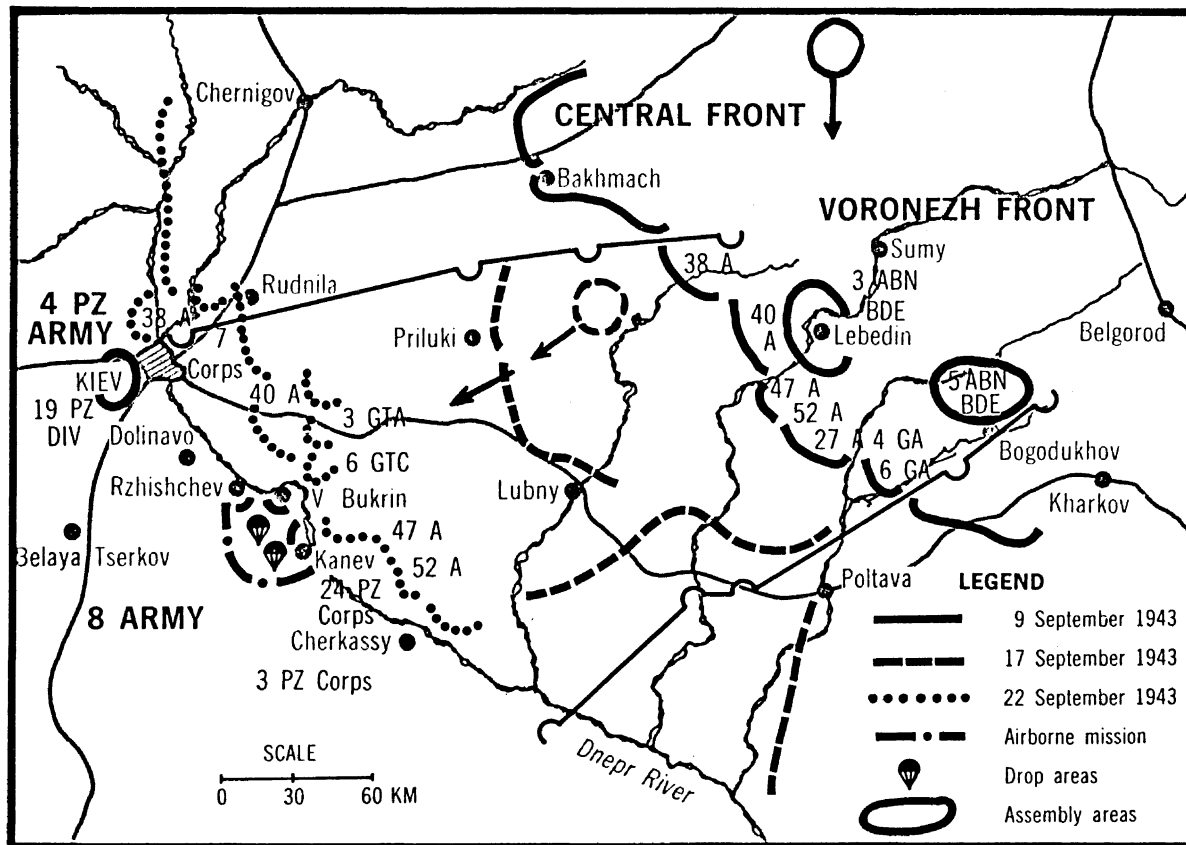
To pursue the withdrawing enemy in an 80 kilometer sector, with three corps (6th Guards Tank, 7th Guards Tank, and 9th Mechanized) in first echelon and a separate tank brigade (91st) and a motorized regiment (50th) in reserve. A forward detachment consisting of a reinforced brigade led the advance of each corps.⁸³

The forward detachments and main force corps each received an objective for each day's advance. The tank army's forward detachments raced forward, fencing with the rear guard of German Fourth Panzer Army; and, on the evening of 21 September, Rybalko ordered the motorized rifle units with the forward detachments to force the Dnepr River north and south of the Dnepr River bend near Veliki Bukrin.

Late in the advance the tank army ran low on fuel to sustain the rapid advance. Rybalko reacted by giving the remaining fuel to the tanks, self-propelled guns, and vehicles of the forward detachments. The motorized rifle forces who could not ride on the vehicles trailed behind on foot. On the night of 20–21 September, the forward detachments covered the last 100 kilometers and approached the river (Figures 37–38), 50–60 kilometers ahead of the follow-on forces of 40th Army and many of the withdrawing German forces as well.

On the morning of 21 September, the reconnaissance parties of the three mobile corps reached the Dnepr, followed closely behind by the three corps' forward detachments: 54th Guards Tank Brigade, 69th Mechanized Brigade, and the 51st Guards Tank Brigade. Later that day, withdrawing German elements of the 10th Panzer Grenadier, 67th Infantry, and 19th Panzer divisions finally crossed the river further south and frantically raced north to erect defenses along the river banks to block the Soviet advance.

Motorized rifle elements of 54th Guards Tank and 69th Mechanized Brigades built makeshift rafts and either rafted or swam across the river and, by the evening of 22 September, had secured bridgeheads on the



37. 3d Guards Tank Army's dash to the Dnepr River, 20–21 September 1943

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

far bank. Since tanks could not cross the river, these forward detachments moved enough antitank guns, machine guns, and men across the river to establish defensible positions in what would initially become one of the most important bridgehead sectors along the river – the Veliki Bukrin sector.

Across a broad front from Konotop to Melitopol', Soviet armies joined 3d Guards Tank Army in the race to the Dnepr. In virtually all cases pursuing units employed forward detachments to lead the pursuit. In most cases, these were division level, though in some instances armies used them as well. The forward detachments, as was the case of 3d Guards Tank Army, tended to increase the tempo of pursuit, in particular, for mobile units.

The arrival of 3d Guards Tank Army units at the Dnepr River opened a new phase during which forward detachments played a critical role – specifically the crossing operations to seize bridgeheads across the Dnepr River. A 9 September STAVKA directive emphasized the importance of quickly overcoming the major obstacles, stating, "The rapid and decisive forcing of rivers, especially large rivers like the Desna and the Dnepr, will have great importance for the future success of our forces."⁸⁴ The 1943 field service regulations drew upon war experiences to note, "The forcing of a river can be conducted in connection with an approach during a meeting clash, during pursuit of the enemy, and when he has successively occupied river defenses. ... Rifle subunits on their own handmade crossing means can rapidly overcome the river at various points along a broad front."⁸⁵ Organic aviation, mobile forces, and forward detachments could play a particularly important role.

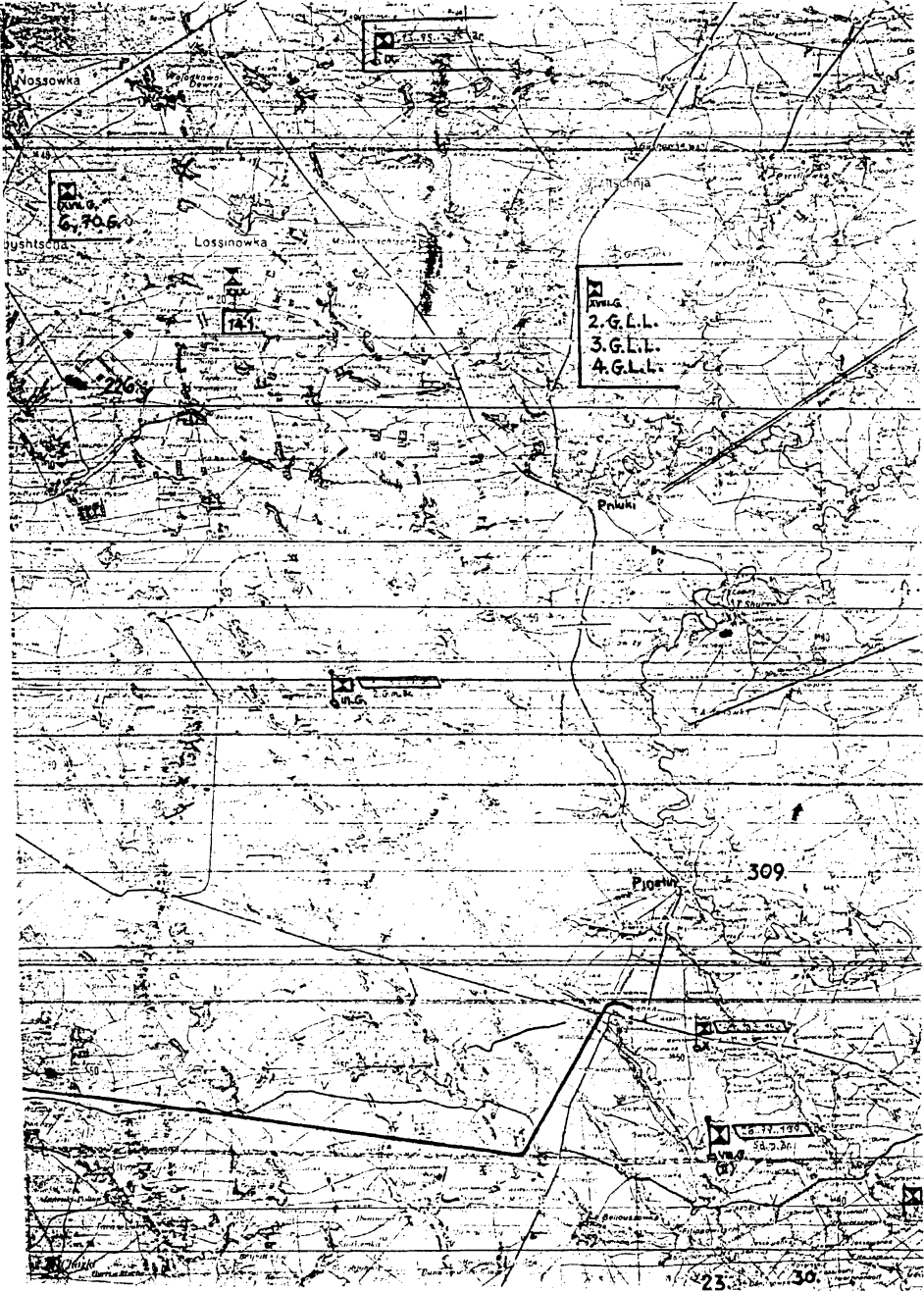
As German forces began their withdrawal, Soviet *front* commanders recognized the necessity of future river crossing operations. General I. S. Konev, the Steppe Front commander, issued orders to his armies to prepare for crossing operations on 20 September when his forces were still 70–150 kilometers from the river. His orders stipulated that crossings be made by 24–25 September and required that forward detachments lead the advance.⁸⁶

Between 21 and 25 September, forces of the Central, Voronezh, Steppe, and Southwestern Fronts reached the Dnepr River along a 700 kilometer front from Loev to Zaporozh'e. Across the entire front, corps and division forward detachments commenced the crossing operations. Most of the detachments received their missions days before their approach to the river, and thus had adequate time to plan a secret, rapid crossing. The forward detachments usually consisted of reinforced rifle battalions.

This is a highly detailed and cluttered military map of the Kiev region in Ukraine. The map shows a complex network of roads, rivers, and administrative boundaries. Key locations are labeled, including 'KIEV' in the center-left, 'Alarm Einheiten' below it, and 'Rahuschtschew' at the bottom. Several military units are identified by handwritten or stamped text, such as 'Misch-Btl. Masius' on the left, 'Tie 291' near Kiev, and 'Tie 84' further east. Numerical codes are scattered throughout, including '86' circled in two places, '75', '82', '143', '132', '183', '121', and '19B'. A prominent dashed line runs diagonally from the upper right towards the bottom center. The map's overall appearance is that of a historical document, possibly from World War II, given the German-style unit names and the nature of the tactical markings.

144

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The 37th Army, introduced from Steppe Front second echelon to lead crossing operations southeast of Kremenchug, created forward detachments in each first echelon rifle division consisting of a rifle battalion reinforced by an artillery battalion, two tank destroyer batteries, and a sapper platoon. Rifle corps detachments usually consisted of a rifle battalion on vehicles, two tank destroyer batteries, a howitzer battery, and a sapper company.⁸⁷

These and other forward detachments advanced quickly to the river from the march; secured crossing sites and bridgeheads, usually at night; and protected the passage of first echelon divisions into the bridgeheads. The four Soviet *fronts* secured 23 bridgeheads of varying size across the Dnepr. However, it was very difficult to expand the bridgeheads because of Soviet inability to move tanks, artillery, and other heavy equipment into the bridgeheads. Consequently, the Germans were able to eradicate several bridgeheads, contain others, and force the Soviets to mount major penetration efforts to break out of the few large bridgeheads they seized. Further south, in the Donbas region, Soviet armies of the Southern Front advanced over 300 kilometers, using forward detachments of from battalion to regimental size to overcome intermediate German defensive positions.⁸⁸

The lessons the Soviets derived from these experiences were clear. First, motorized pontoon bridge elements were required for hasty river crossings; and these units would have to march with forward detachments or other lead elements. Second, there was a need for more rapid bridge construction across major rivers to speed the crossing by main force units. Solution of these problems would require changes in force structure and equipment. Despite these problems, the forward detachments proved their worth in river crossing operations along the Dnepr River.

A third notable example of the benefits and problems of forward detachment operations occurred during the Kiev operation (November 1943) when Soviet forces finally broke out of their Dnepr River bridgeheads, to secure a strategic bridgehead deeper in the Ukraine.

In late October 1943, after repeated Soviet attempts to break out of the bridgehead at Veliki Bukrin had failed, General Vatutin, the 1st Ukrainian (formerly Voronezh) Front commander, devised a strategic ruse to penetrate the Dnepr River defense line.⁸⁹ He planned to move 3d Guards Tank Army secretly northward from its positions in the Veliki Bukrin bridgehead, insert it into the smaller bridgehead at Liutezh, north of Kiev, and to attack with 38th Army and 3d Guards Tank Army against German positions north of Kiev to secure the city and an expanded foothold in the Ukraine. Between 27 October and 3

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

November Vatutin regrouped the bulk of his *front*'s forces and prepared for the attack.

Vatutin's 38th Army was to conduct the penetration operation on 3 November, and 3d Guards Tank Army would join the attack on the morning of 4 November and exploit toward Fastov.⁹⁰ Rybalko's tank army formed for the attack in two echelons. His lead tank corps (6th and 7th Guards) each deployed along two march routes in columns of brigades with each corps employing a reinforced brigade as forward detachment. The army sector of advance was eight kilometers, and its line of commitment six to eight kilometers into the German defenses. Once through the German defenses, the forward detachments would operate 15–20 kilometers forward of the main force corps. To assist in 38th Army's penetration operation, 6th Guards Tank Corps provided two tank brigades for infantry support. The 9th Mechanized Corps deployed in army second echelon with the 91st Separate Tank Brigade in army reserve.

The offensive began at 0840 with an artillery preparation. Thereafter, 38th Army's rifle units assaulted; and, by the end of the day, advanced four kilometers against heavy opposition from newly arrived German reserves. At 1030 4 November Vatutin ordered Rybalko's tank army forward. Because of heavy resistance, Rybalko replaced 7th Guards Tank Corps in first echelon with 9th Mechanized Corps because it was a better balanced combined arms force. Soon all of 3d Guards Tank Army was involved in heavy fighting in the midst of the German defenses, demonstrating what would occur if a tank army was not committed into a "clean" penetration.

Late on 5 November, German defenses finally began to crumble; and 3d Guards Tank Army regrouped and prepared to bypass the infantry and begin an exploitation to the southwest. Rybalko's corps immediately reformed their forward detachments to lead the advance. In the meantime, Rybalko designated the 91st Separate Tank Brigade as an army forward detachment and ordered it to advance rapidly and secure the key communications hub of Fastov.⁹¹ Advancing on the morning of 6 November, by nightfall the army forward detachment had traversed 50 kilometers and reached Fastov. That night, without an artillery preparation, the brigade struck German defenders in the city from three sides. By morning, the 6th Guards Tank Corps' forward detachment (51st Guards Tank Brigade) joined the assault and, together, the forward detachments cleared German forces from the city by day's end. In the process they destroyed major elements of German 25th Panzer Division's panzer grenadier regiment.

The pre-emptive seizure of Fastov by the forward detachments

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

prompted Rybalko to order his two lead corps (9th Mechanized and 7th Guards Tank) to develop the exploitation rapidly toward the southwest. On 8 November the corps began their new thrust, led by the reinforced 71st Mechanized and 55th Guards Tank Brigades, respectively. That evening the 55th Guards Tank Brigade occupied Pavoloch 40 kilometers southwest of Fastov and erected all-round defenses. The following morning 71st Mechanized Brigade reached Popel'naia 10 kilometers north of Pavoloch where it also halted to await the arrival of its parent corps.

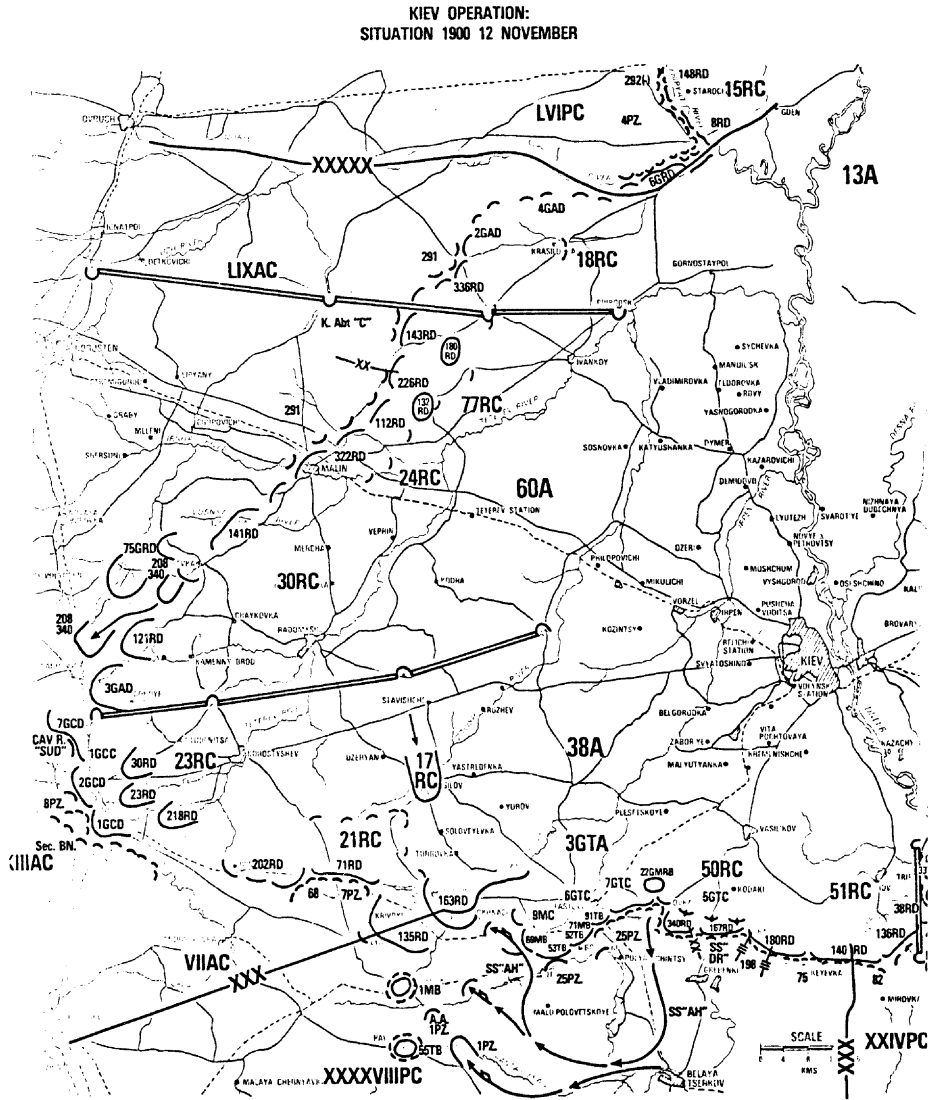
The parent corps (9th Mechanized and 6th Guards Tank), however, were attacked by German reserves at and south of Fastov in what proved to be the beginning of a major German counterattack. The Germans pinned down the two corps, and, in heavy combat on 10 and 11 November, other German units isolated and encircled the two forward detachments (Figures 39–40). After four days of heavy fighting, both forward detachments destroyed their remaining equipment; and the surviving personnel broke out of encirclement and withdrew to the new front lines in the Fastov area.⁹²

In a situation analogous to that at Belgorod–Khar'kov, after a successful initial advance, two forward detachments were essentially destroyed, thus damaging 3d Guards Tank Army. Even so, the forward detachments had held out significantly longer than their earlier counterparts and had, as a result, hindered the first German counterattack, which subsequently failed. The lesson for the Soviets was that they still had to determine the proper operational range of forward detachments within which they could expect to receive main force support. After the Kiev operation, whenever possible, the Soviets would field more numerous forward detachments which could better support one another. They also began to use army forward detachments more extensively than before.

During the second period of war, the number of forward detachments employed at each level of command increased, as did the depth and complexity of their combat missions. Detachments of mobile forces operated particularly effectively; those of rifle armies, corps, and divisions were still hampered by lack of transport means and, to some extent, logistical shortcomings. A September 1943 Southern Front war experience report commented:

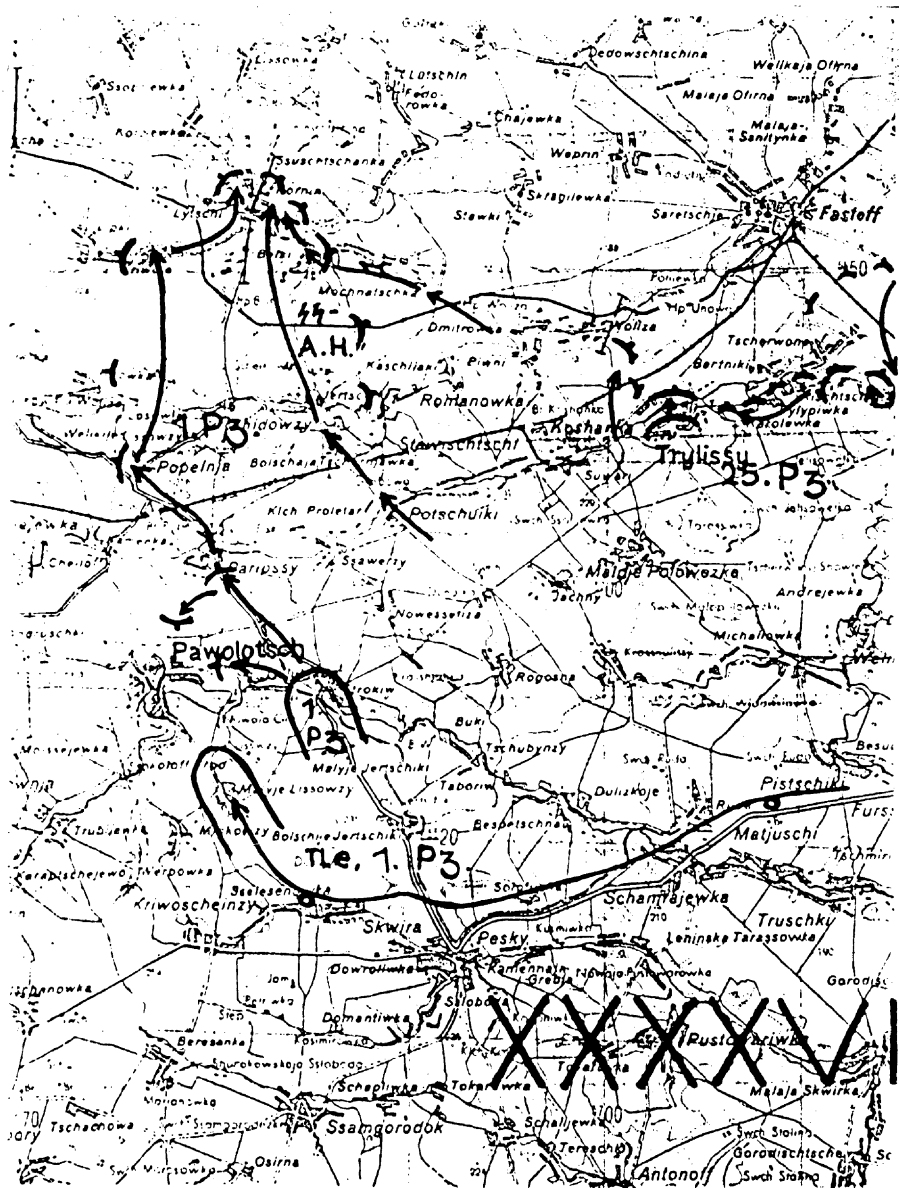
The lack of requisite motor transport in order to provide all first echelon divisions with forward detachments, led to a situation in which the majority of forward detachments moved on foot; became worn out; and, as a result, the pursuit tempo slowed.

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



39. Kiev operation: Situation, 1900 12 November 1943

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



40. Kiev operation: German situation map, 2200 13 November 1943

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Sometimes the enemy succeeded in breaking contact with our forward detachments and gaining time to consolidate on intermediate lines. In those cases when forward detachments were provided with motor transport, their operations were swift, bold, and effective. They relentlessly pursued the enemy, boldly and decisively brushed aside and scattered his covering detachments, penetrated behind the rear guard line, seized populated areas in the enemy rear, and sowed panic and undermined the strength of his resistance.⁹³

Throughout the period forward detachments expanded their missions to include: assisting the commitment to combat of main force mobile and rifle formations; seizing intermediate enemy defense positions; preventing the enemy from breaking contact during a pursuit; securing crossing sites over natural obstacles; assisting the deployment of advance guards and main forces during a meeting engagement; occupying key positions in the enemy defense until the arrival of main forces; and developing the subsequent offensive. As before, forward detachments operated during the march, pursuit, and in anticipation of meeting engagements. For the first time, although often unintentionally, they participated in later stages of penetration operations. This aspect of operations would also be more fully developed in 1944 and 1945. Finally, forward detachment operations remained distinctly tactical in nature, primarily because of their limited number, size, and scope of mission.

The Third Period

After 24 December 1943 (the commencement of the Zhitomir-Berdichev operation), the Red Army was on the offensive almost continuously until war's end. The strategic initiative was in Soviet hands, and the only remaining questions were how long would it take to achieve final victory, and what cost would it entail? During the last 18 months of war, Soviet offensive operations were grander in scope and far more complex. Planning was done on a campaign basis, each of which encompassed multiple operations by single *fronts* or groups of *fronts*, all unified as to timing and mission by a single coordinated plan. Although the basic force structure necessary to carry out campaigns and individual offensives was in place in July 1943, that structure was further refined in the last two years of war. The conceptual framework for operations on every scale, in place by late 1943, was also further refined by regulations issued in 1944.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The same maturation and refinement process applied to operational and tactical maneuver forces. Although the framework and scope of mobile group and forward detachment operations were fairly well defined by late 1943, in 1944 and 1945 both combat elements would contribute even more to the achievement of offensive success. The numbers of maneuver forces increased, their composition was better adjusted to suit combat realities, and the techniques for their use became more sophisticated. Simply stated, they could and did do more. While these forces contributed uniformly to the favorable outcome of offensive operations, their role and impact grew as the Soviets conducted against the German army the last three major campaigns and the final Berlin operation that spanned the last 18 months of war. Thereafter, they expanded their role further in the campaign which, in fact, represented a transitional phase between the Great Patriotic War against Germany, and Soviet adjustment to the new realities of a post-war world – the campaign against the Japanese in Manchuria, in August 1945.

Military operations during the last 18 months of war occurred primarily within the context of three major campaigns: the winter–spring campaign of 1944 (24 December 1943–April 1944), the summer campaign of 1944 (22 June–August 1944), and the winter campaign of 1945 (12 January–February 1945). Thereafter followed the climactic Berlin operation. In between the campaigns were operations designed to consolidate gains and regroup for new large-scale offensive operations.

Soviet campaign planning for the winter of 1944 focused on defeating German forces in the Ukraine and destroying them or driving them back beyond the Polish and Rumanian frontiers. To that end, the Soviets concentrated the bulk of their mobile forces in the south and planned operations which, unlike the case of previous years, would endure well into the spring. By April, after a series of major *front* and multi-*front* operations, the Soviets had achieved their strategic aim.

In the summer campaign, the Soviets sought to destroy or defeat virtually all German army groups in a series of successive offensive operations, beginning in Belorussia, shifting to southern Poland and the Baltic region, and ending in Rumania. By late August, Soviet forces had pinned Army Group North against the Baltic Sea, cleared Army Groups Center and North Ukraine from the regions east of East Prussia and the Narev and Vistula Rivers, and driven Army Group South Ukraine from Rumania.

After fall operations against the German flanks, in the January–February 1945 campaign Soviet forces drove westward along the main Warsaw–Berlin strategic axis to the Baltic coast and the Oder River,

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

just 60 kilometers from Berlin, destroying German forces in Poland in the process. After again clearing their flanks, in April the Soviets conducted the final struggle for Berlin.

Forward detachments were the premier Soviet tactical maneuver force in all the operations comprising these campaigns. Their success provided the essential basis for Soviet success with operational maneuver; and, in turn, operational maneuver was the key ingredient in Soviet strategic success. Despite the universal use of forward detachments in operations of both mobile and rifle forces, there was room for improvement after their performance in 1943. The ensuing campaigns and operations provided a context for that improvement.

The Soviet 1943–44 winter offensive on the southwestern direction (axis) took the form of ten distinct operations, some sequential and some almost simultaneous. The first, which began in late December 1943 (Zhitomir–Berdichev), represented both a culmination of the Kiev operation to secure a strategic bridgehead across the Dnepr and the commencement of the new strategic offensive. Subsequently, through the winter, Soviet forces conducted nine more operations as follows:

- Kirovograd – 5–16 January 1944 (2d Ukrainian Front)
- Korsun–Shevchenkovskii – 24 January–17 February 1944 (1st and 2d Ukrainian Fronts)
- Rovno–Lutsk – 29 January–11 February 1944 (1st Ukrainian Front)
- Nikopol'–Krivoi Rog – 30 January–29 February 1944 (3d and 4th Ukrainian Fronts)
- Proskurov–Chernovtsy – 4 March–17 April 1944 (1st Ukrainian Front)
- Uman–Botoshany – 5 March–17 April 1944 (2d Ukrainian Front)
- Bereznegovataia–Snigirevka – 6–18 March 1944 (3d Ukrainian Front)
- Odessa – 26 March–14 April 1944 (3d Ukrainian Front)
- Crimea – 8 April–12 May 1944 (4th Ukrainian Front)

Soviet decisive use of forward detachments during the Zhitomir–Berdichev and Korsun–Shevchenkovskii operations set the tone for such operations throughout the winter and early spring. The Soviets planned the Zhitomir operation during the late stages of their defense of the enlarged Kiev bridgehead. In early and mid-December, they secretly concentrated a massive force near Brusilov, west of Kiev.⁹⁴ Three rifle armies (1st Guards, 18th, and 38th) were to penetrate German defenses; and then two tank armies (1st and 3d Guards) would

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

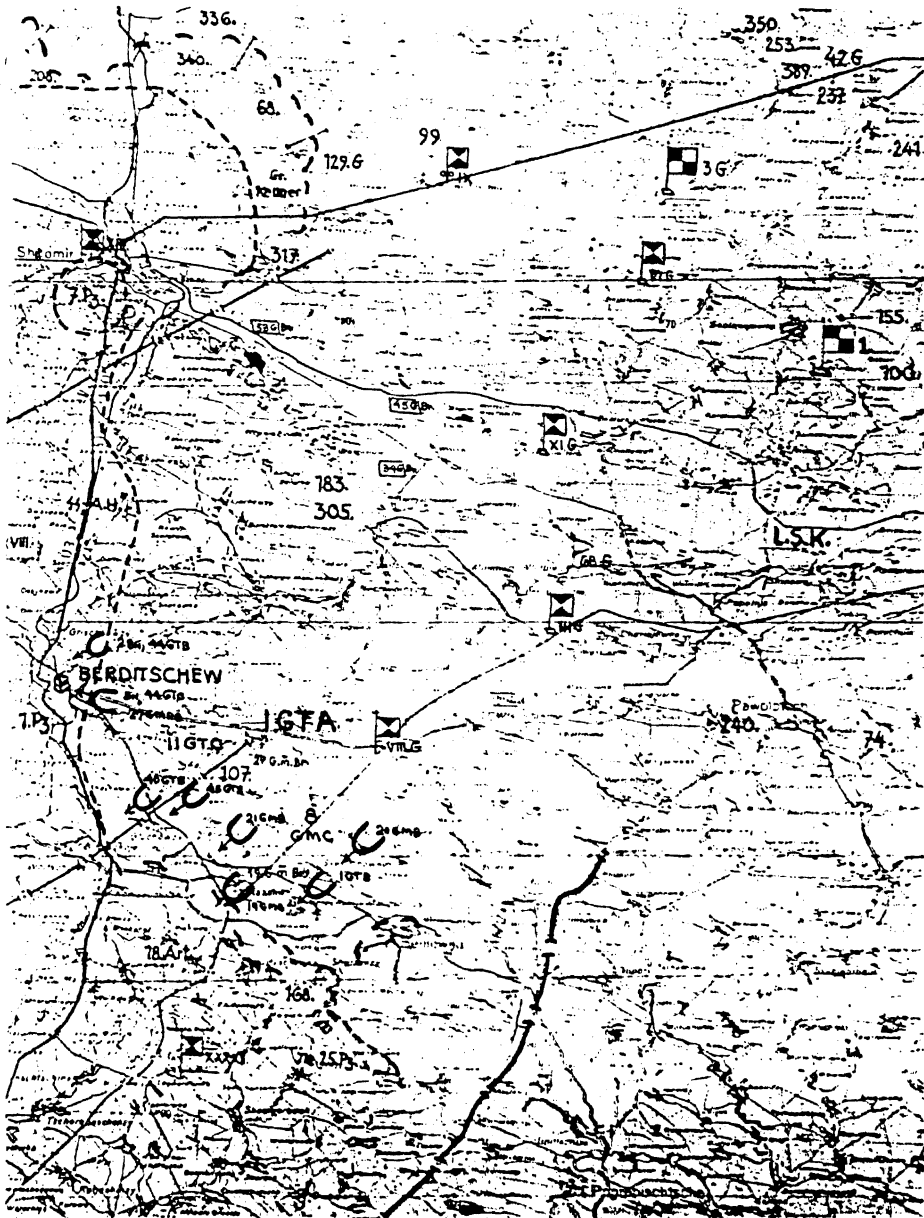
exploit toward Zhitomir, Berdichev, and Vinnitsa (a depth of 150 kilometers). Thereafter Soviet armies on the left flank (60th and 13th) would join the attack, spearheaded by separate tank corps (4th Guards, 5th Guards, 25th). The 24 December attack developed as planned, and the two tank armies began their exploitation at 1230 on 24 December with reinforced tank brigades serving as forward detachments of the two first echelon mobile corps in each tank army. Subsequently, the forward detachments led the advance toward Zhitomir and Berdichev.

Despite bad weather, 1st Tank Army's forward detachments crossed the Irpen River from the march and thrust further southward.⁹⁵ The 1st Tank Army seized Kazatin, 100 kilometers from its start point, on 28 December (Figure 41). After shifting its advance southeastward on 7 January, Vatutin ordered 1st Tank Army to attack southwestward to seize Zhmerinka, southwest of Vinnitsa. Lieutenant General M. E. Katukov, 1st Tank Army commander, ordered his two lead corps (11th Guards Tank and 8th Guards Mechanized) to create reinforced forward detachments which were to race ahead of the main force and envelop Zhmerinka from the northeast and southeast. 11th Guards Tank Corps designated 40th Guards Tank Brigade and 8th Guards Mechanized Corps' 1st Guards Tank Brigade as forward detachments. The brigades were to cross the Southern Bug River near Komarov, seize Zhmerinka, and cut enemy routes of reinforcement to and withdrawal from Vinnitsa.

The two brigades commenced operations at 0930 on 9 January; 40th Guards Tank Brigade formed its own forward detachment, a reinforced battalion to lead its march. 11th Guards Tank Corps' 45th Guards Tank Brigade, with a battalion operating as a forward detachment, followed the 40th Guards Tank Brigade echeloned to its rear.

During the morning, 45th Guards Tank Brigade crossed the Southern Bug River near Komarov, drove off elements of defending German 101st Jaeger Division, and penetrated to Iaryshevka on the Vinnitsa-Zhmerinka rail line, where, at midday, it ran into German infantry of the 371st Infantry Division, dispatched to hold the rail line. By evening, a tank battalion, serving as forward detachment of 40th Guards Tank Brigade, swept around the German right flank and occupied Gnivan' and another bridge over the Southern Bug (Figure 42). There, and at Iaryshevka, elements of the tank brigade faced heavy counterattack from German 371st Infantry Division, supported by tanks, probably from 16th Panzer Division. Heavy fighting raged throughout 10 and 11 January, although late on 10 January 11th Guards Tank Corps ordered the brigade remnants to withdraw.

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



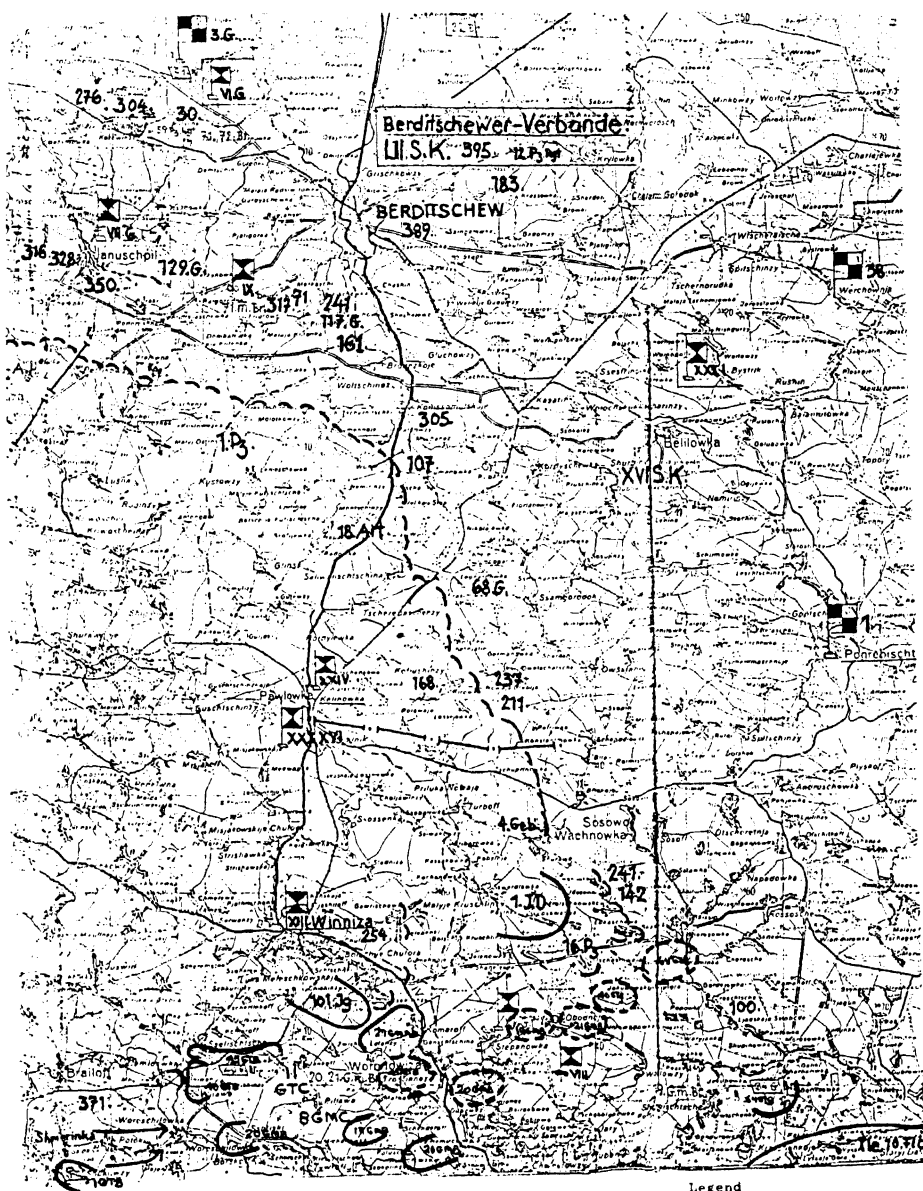
Legend





Actual Soviet unit locations,
29 December 1943

41. Zhitomir-Berdichev operation: German situation map, 29 December 1943

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



Legend

-  Actual Soviet unit locations, 10 January 1944
-  Planned Soviet positions, 11 January 1944

42. Zhitomir-Berdichev operation: German situation map, 10 January 1944

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Meanwhile, 40th Guards Tank Brigade's forward detachment crossed the Southern Bug River at Komarov, surrounded elements of 101st Jaeger Division, and dispatched its forward detachment battalion to Gnivan' to assist 45th Guards Tank Brigade. The remainder of the 40th Guards Tank Brigade, assisted by the newly arrived 27th Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade, continued to struggle with 101st Jaeger Division at and north of Komarov. Eventually the remainder of 40th Guards Tank Brigade joined its forward detachment at Gnivan' and dispatched another battalion forward to seize Mogilevka further down the rail line toward Zhmerinka. By early 11 January three brigades of 11th Guards Tank Corps threatened Zhmerinka and occupied positions from Mogilevka northeastward across the Southern Bug River to north of Obodnoe.

The 8th Guards Mechanized Corps' forward detachment, 1st Guards Tank Brigade, crossed the Southern Bug River early on 9 January and raced west toward Zhmerinka. At 1500 it reached and seized Sutiski, 10 kilometers from Zhmerinka. After securing a key bridge, it moved on Borskova and Novo-Petrovka 10 kilometers southeast of Zhmerinka, where it destroyed a small German garrison. At 0500 10 January, in the midst of a driving snowstorm and without waiting for support from the 40th and 45th Guards Tank Brigades, the 1st Guards Tank Brigade assaulted German 371st Infantry Division positions at Zhukovtsy just southeast of Zhmerinka, overcame those units, and penetrated into Zhmerinka at 0830. After hours of heavy street fighting, during which it lost eight tanks and self-propelled guns, almost half its strength, at 1500 the brigade was forced to withdraw to Sutiski, then defended by the follow-on 20th Guards Mechanized Brigade (Figure 43).

Thereafter, a major German counterattack developed by German 16th Panzer and 4th Mountain Divisions operating eastward from Vinnitsa, from the 254th Infantry and 101st Jaeger Divisions advancing southeast from Vinnitsa, and by 371st Infantry, which held Zhmerinka and began an attack westward. The counterattack took a heavy toll on the lead brigades of 1st Tank Army; but, by 13 January, lead rifle elements of Soviet 38th Army arrived to help 1st Tank Army stabilize its defenses southeast of Vinnitsa.

In the Zhitomir-Berdichev operation, 1st Tank Army advanced over 160 kilometers. Much of its early advance was made possible by the skillful operations of its brigade-size forward detachments. The final "Vinnitsa Raid" by 11th Guards Tank and 8th Guards Mechanized Corps' forward detachments penetrated 50–60 kilometers deep, across the Southern Bug River into the German rear. Although the forward detachments did not secure their ultimate objective of

C

158

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Zhmerinka, they forced the Germans to devote considerable reserves to eliminate the dangerous salient south of Vinnitsa and prevented them from making headway against other Soviet forces which threatened Berdichev. While doing so they carved a salient 120 kilometers wide and 60 kilometers deep east of Vinnitsa. For its services, the 1st Tank Army received a "Guards" honorific; and several of the forward detachment commanders were awarded "Hero of the Soviet Union."

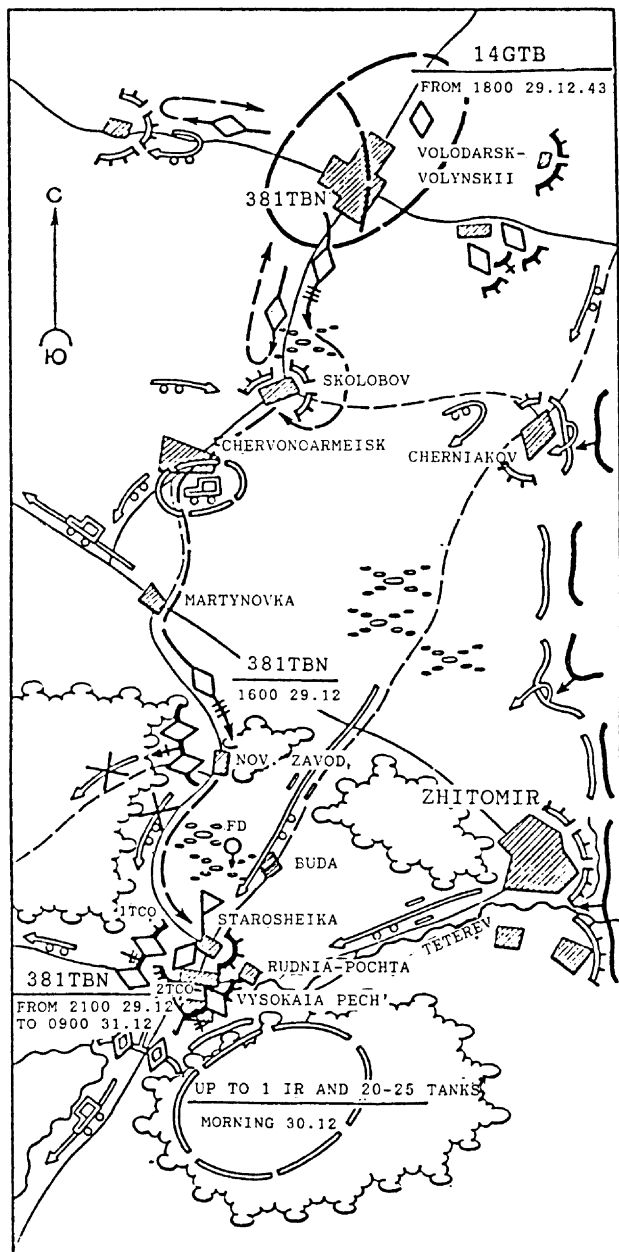
During the same operation, further north, 4th Guards Tank Corps served as the mobile group for 60th Army with the mission of exploiting from the area east of Korosten southward through Chervonoarmeisk to cut enemy withdrawal routes running west and southwest of Zhitomir.⁹⁷ The corps advanced on 28 December, penetrated through the gap between German LIX and XIII Army Corps, cut the Korosten–Zhitomir road, and seized Volodarsk-Volynsky at a depth of 60 kilometers in the German rear.

As German forces struggled to erect new defenses around Zhitomir, early on 29 December, Major General P. P. Poluboiarov, the corps commander, received orders to seize Chervonoarmeisk, 50 kilometers away; erect an all round defense; and then block routes into Zhitomir (Figure 44). Poluboiarov dispatched the 13th Guards Tank Brigade as a forward detachment to seize the town from the march. It gained a foothold in the town but could clear it of Germans only after the 12th Guards Tank Brigade arrived to assist. Thereafter, the three tank brigades (11th Guards, 13th Guards, 14th Guards) fanned out to advance southward with forward detachments in the lead to cut German withdrawal routes and make the German defense of Zhitomir untenable; 3d Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade remained on the defense at Chernovoarmeisk.

Each of Poluboiarov's brigades in turn led its advance across a 50 kilometer front with forward detachments of reinforced battalion strength, each preceded by combat reconnaissance patrols which harassed and engaged scattered German rear service units west of Zhitomir. Lieutenant Colonel V. Petrov, 14th Guards Tank Brigade's commander, ordered his 381st Tank Battalion, reinforced with a self-propelled gun battery and two automatic weapons companies, to form a forward detachment and advance at 1400 29 December and, by 2000 that day, seize the village of Vysokaia Pech' located on the main road running southwest from Zhitomir, 50 kilometers distant.⁹⁸

Led by reconnaissance and security elements, the battalion advanced southward in battalion column; cut the main road running northwest from Zhitomir; and, by 1600, its advance party (tank platoon) seized Novyi Zavod from units of the hard-pressed German 213th Security

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



44. 4th Guards Tank Corps operations: 29–31 December 1943

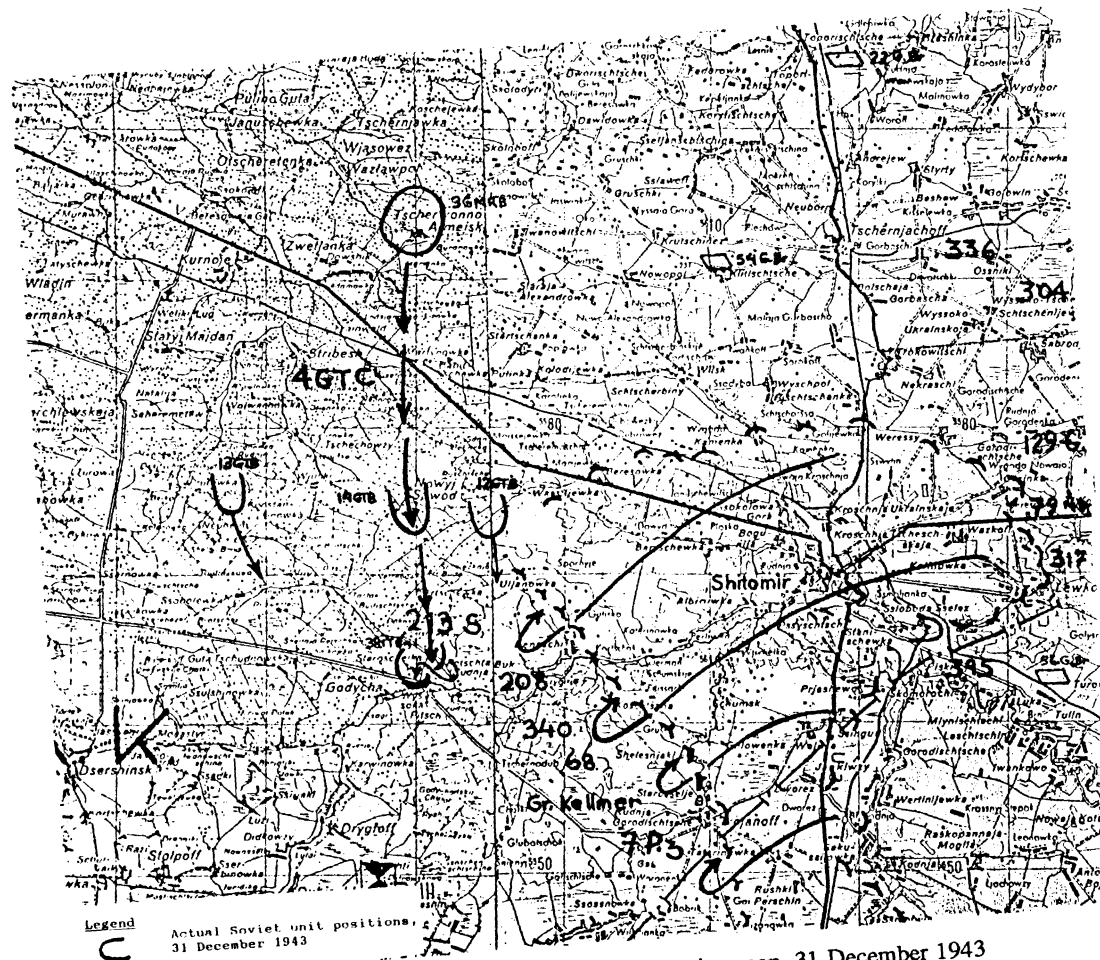
EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Division which attempted to defend the German left flank northwest of Zhitomir. After brigade reconnaissance elements reported heavy German movement along the roads westward from Zhitomir, the brigade commander urged his forward detachment on. By 2000 the battalion had driven German elements from Starosheika and approached Vysokaia Pech' where it observed dense columns of vehicles and tanks with headlights blazing, moving along the road through the village and to the southwest (later identified as elements of 7th Panzer and 208th Infantry Divisions). The battalion commander decided to move southeast to Rudnia-Pochta and then southwest to envelop Vysokaia Pech'. In a rapid night march, the battalion secured Rudnia-Pochta; cut the road; turned west; and, at 2100, struck the eastern outskirts of Vysokaia Pech' and, in heavy fighting, seized a key bridge on the Teterev River and the northern sector of the town. It could not, however, dislodge the Germans from positions in the part of the town south of the river.

On the morning of 30 December, heavy German counterattacks struck the battalion's defensive positions north of the river to halt the fire which hindered the withdrawal of German forces from Zhitomir (Figure 45). The battalion stubbornly defended its position throughout the day. Meanwhile, Poluboiarov dispatched the 12th Guards Tank Brigade to join the attack on the town from the east while the 13th Guards Tank Brigade did so from the west. The remainder of 14th Guards Tank Brigade hastened forward to assist its beleaguered forward detachment. By nightfall on 31 December, Vysokaia Pech' was cleared of Germans. The enemy, under pressure from Soviet forces attacking Zhitomir from the east and harassed by 4th Guards Tank Corps units in their rear, abandoned their defenses around Zhitomir and began a withdrawal southwest, harassed all the while by fire from the stubborn Soviet forward detachment and its supporting brigades.

Operations by 4th Guards Tank Corps' forward detachments were classic. Poluboiarov's corps, functioning as a mobile group, advanced deep into the enemy rear. While doing so, Poluboiarov used brigade-size detachments to penetrate deep into the enemy rear and seize key objectives. His brigades then employed reinforced battalion-size forward detachments to spearhead their operations. The net result was a rapid advance which ultimately unhinged German defenses around Zhitomir.

During the Korsun-Shevchenkovskii operation both 5th Guards and 6th Tank Army employed forward detachments to exploit penetration operations rapidly and to assist in encircling two German corps. The



45. Zhitomir-Berdichev operation: German situation map, 31 December 1943

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

operation, conducted jointly by the 1st and 2d Ukrainian Fronts, was designed to eliminate a large German salient occupied by two army corps and anchored on the south bank of the Dnepr near Cherkassy.⁹⁹ The two *fronts* planned to penetrate German defenses from the east and west and commit tank armies to develop the penetration and link up to encircle the two German corps. Each penetrating tank army was to use forward detachments to effect the link up, while tank army main forces formed an outer encirclement line.

The 1st Ukrainian Front's 6th Tank Army, formed days before, operated in *front* first echelon with its two mobile corps (5th Guards Tank and 5th Mechanized) operating in close coordination with attached rifle forces. Lieutenant General A. G. Kravchenko, the tank army commander, kept the 233d Separate Tank Brigade in reserve. The 2d Ukrainian Front planned to commit Lieutenant General P. A. Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army to combat late in the first day of operations after German tactical defenses had been penetrated. The two *front* assaults would occur two days apart (Figure 46).

On 25 January 1944 Soviet rifle forces of the 2d Ukrainian Front began their assault and penetrated up to 10 kilometers into the enemy defenses.¹⁰⁰ At 1400 Rotmistrov's army went into action with the 20th and 29th Tank Corps in first echelon, followed by the 18th Tank Corps. Each lead corps had two reinforced brigades in first echelon, followed by a third brigade in second echelon. The fourth brigade either provided an army reserve or was designated to operate as a forward detachment in the depth of the enemy defenses.

Although German reinforcements arrived late on the first day of operations, and, for a time, threatened to close the penetration, Rotmistrov's forces, with the front commander's approval, continued into the depths of the German defenses. Within four days the 155th Tank Brigade, forward detachment of 29th Tank Corps, had penetrated 75 kilometers and linked up with 6th Tank Army forces at Zvenigorodka, encircling the two German corps (Figures 47–48). The remainder of the tank army deployed facing south to thwart German relief attempts. Other forward detachments from follow-on cavalry forces helped create the inner encirclement line, while rifle forces, also led by forward detachments, raced forward to reinforce the encirclement lines and, ultimately, reduce the encircled German force.

Meanwhile 6th Tank Army began its attack from the west on 26 January.¹⁰¹ Initially the two mobile corps made little progress against strong German infantry defenses. However, a Soviet rifle division of cooperating 40th Army made progress in a secondary sector to the north. Urged on by both the *STAVKA* representative Marshal G. K.

164

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Zhukov and the *front* commander General Vatutin, Kravchenko created a special forward detachment around the nucleus of his reserve 233d Tank Brigade and appointed the deputy commander of 5th Mechanized Corps, Major General M. I. Savelev, to command it. The 233d Tank Brigade received in attachment a self-propelled artillery regiment, a motorized rifle battalion, and a tank destroyer battery. It contained 55 tanks and self-propelled guns, four antitank guns, and 200 infantry with automatic weapons riding on the tanks and guns. The forward detachment's mission was to exploit through the secondary sector, bypass German units, and advance to link up with 2d Ukrainian Front forces.

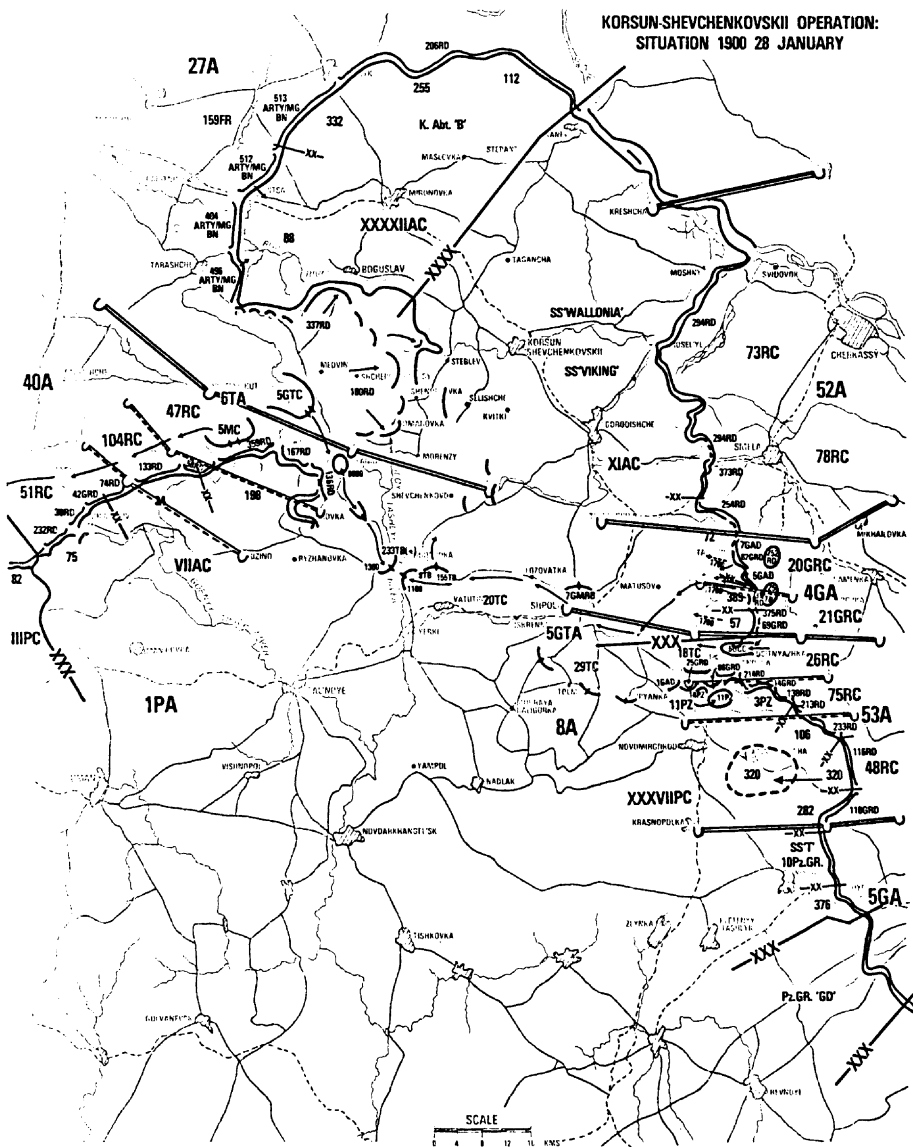
On the morning of 27 January the detachment began its advance and, by 2400, it had reached Lysianka, deep in the German rear. At 0800 on 28 January, it resumed its advance and, at 1300 hours, reached Zvenigorodka. After several hours of heavy street fighting in cooperation with the 155th Tank Brigade of 5th Guards Tank Army, the two units cleared German units from the city. The bulk of 6th Tank Army's 5th Guards Tank Corps exploited along the route of the 233d Tank Brigade, taking advantage of its audacious advance. By evening 28 January the trap had snapped shut around the German forces, beginning two weeks of intense attempts by the Germans to relieve the encircled force.

In the Korsun-Shevchenkivskii operation the decisive actions of forward detachments created the conditions necessary for the encirclement of German forces. Forward detachment operations during the Zhitomir-Berdichev and Korsun-Shevchenkivskii operations typified like operations throughout the remainder of the winter campaign, in particular during the Proskurov-Chernovtsy operation in March, involving operations by three Soviet tank armies.

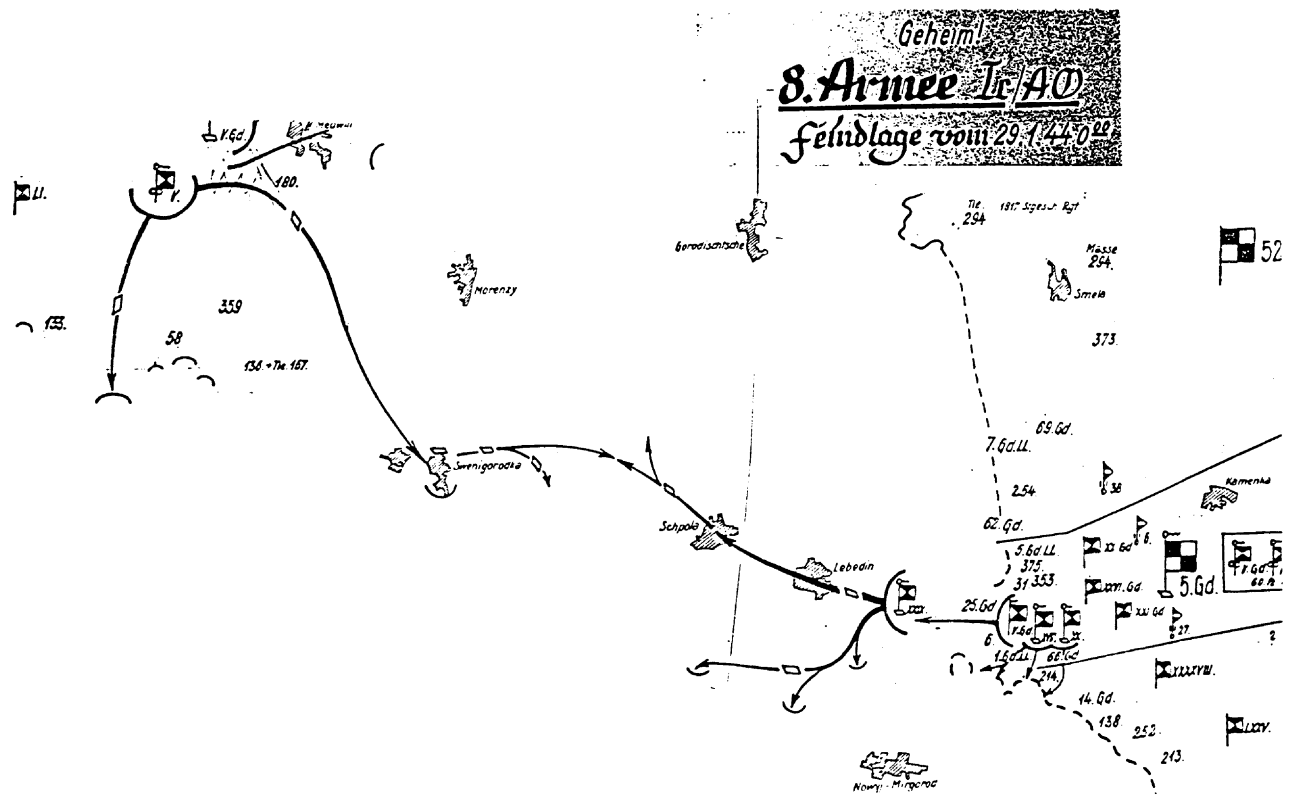
In general, although severely inhibited by bad winter weather and the subsequent spring thaw, forward detachments, conducting tactical maneuver, facilitated the successful advance of their parent tank armies and tank and mechanized corps and increased the forward operational tempo. In extremely bad conditions, forward detachments served cavalry forces and newly created cavalry-mechanized groups in the same manner. The resulting pressure on German defenses produced numerous, ever-larger encirclements of enemy forces (although most escaped) and, ultimately, forced the Germans to withdraw from the Ukraine. Only when the mobile forces and their forward detachments had eroded in strength from near constant combat did the momentum of the strategic offensive falter.

After a two-month lull for planning, refitting forces, and necessary

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



47. Korsun-Shevchenkovskii operation: Situation, 28 January 1944



EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

48. Korsun-Shevchenkivskii operation: German situation map, 28 January 1944

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

regrouping, the Soviets, in June, commenced their summer campaign, a series of successive strategic offensives which included the following distinct operations:

Karelian Isthmus–south Karelia – 10 June–9 August 1944

Belorussia – 23 June–29 August 1944

L'vov–Sandomierz – 13 July–29 August 1944

Lublin–Brest – 18 July–2 August 1944 (technically part of the Belorussian operation, but in reality a link between that operation and the L'vov–Sandomierz operation)

Iassy–Kishinev – 20 August–7 September 1944

Each operation took advantage of conditions created by earlier operations, a principal feature of the strategic campaign plan.

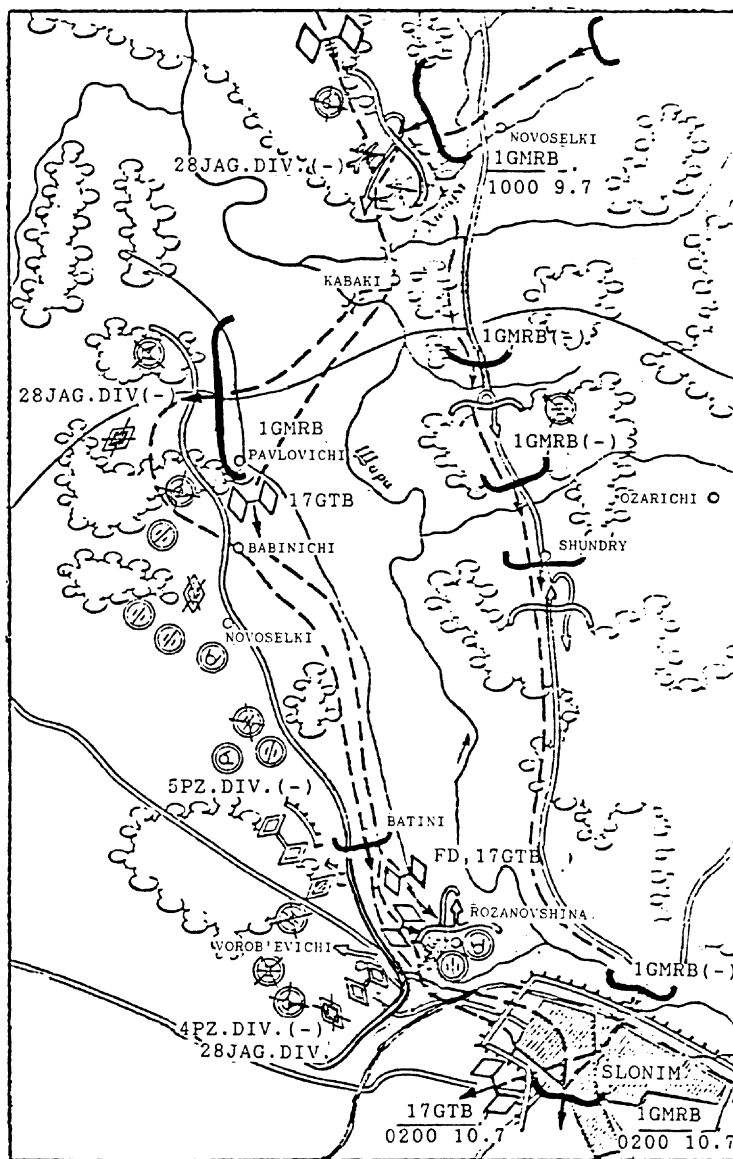
Operational maneuver, often with strategic consequences, and extensive tactical maneuver played a major role in all operations. It was axiomatic by the summer of 1944 that where mobile forces succeeded, offensives also succeeded. The converse held true as well. Thus, the success of the operations attested to the success of those mobile operations. In each of the operations, forward detachments played a significant role.

The Belorussian operation took the form of consecutive encirclement operations, first of forward German units defending the cities of Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobruisk and then of all of German Army Group Center operating east of Minsk.¹⁰² Initially this meant encircling multiple forces of up to 100,000 men and, ultimately, almost 400,000. Success in this endeavor required, first, rapid fragmentation of German defenses and, second, the maintenance of high operational tempo, in particular on the part of deep operating mobile forces. It also required rifle forces to keep up sufficiently to protect any mobile force that encountered difficulties during the offensive.

Forward detachments would have to perform the tactical maneuver necessary to accomplish these tasks. They would have to assist in rapid penetration and exploitation of tactical defenses, begin the exploitation, prevent erection of subsequent defensive positions, and facilitate the deep operations of operational maneuver forces.

During the penetration operation, forward detachments were usually designated in advance to develop the tactical penetration after rifle forces had overcome the enemy's first defensive positions. For example, 6th Guards, 43d, and 39th Armies, attacking north of Vitebsk, created divisional forward detachments consisting of rifle battalions riding on tanks reinforced by self-propelled and antitank artillery and sometimes organized around the nucleus of separate tank

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT



COMBAT ACTIONS OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT AND MAIN FORCE OF 17TH GUARDS TANK BRIGADE AND 1ST GUARDS MOTORIZED RIFLE BRIGADE IN THE SLONIM REGION, 9-10.7.44.

49. Belorussian operation: 1st Guards Tank Corps' advance on Slonim, July 1944

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

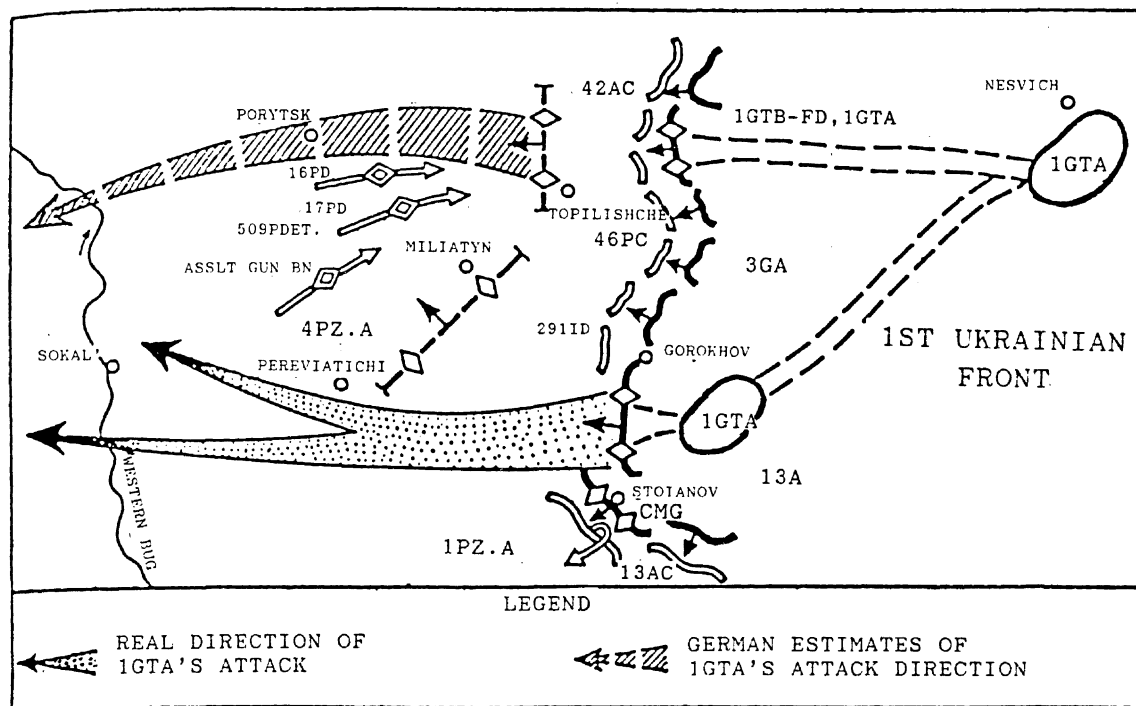
brigades to develop initial tactical success.¹⁰³ These forward detachments seized crossings over the Northern Dvina River from the march and initially closed the encirclement around forward elements of German Third Panzer Army.

Once operational maneuver forces of the four participating *fronts* were committed (5th Guards Tank Army, two cavalry-mechanized groups, 1st Guards, 2d Guards, 1st, 9th Tank Corps), forward detachments led their deep exploitation (for example, operations of 2d Guards Tank Corps' 4th Guards Tank Brigade in the envelopment of Orsha and subsequent advance across the Berezina River to Minsk; 1st Guards and 9th Tank Corps' advance to encircle Bobruisk and then thrust toward Minsk; 5th Guards Tank Army's advance through Borisov to Minsk; and 3d Guards Mechanized Corps' drive to seize key communications routes into Minsk at Molodechno).¹⁰⁴ Especially valuable during this period was the work done by forward detachments to pre-empt German defenses.

While in the operational depths, forward detachments kept up the momentum of the advance by securing deep objectives by surprise. During 5th Guards Tank Army's advance on Vilnius, brigade-size forward detachments, operating far ahead, seized crossings over the Neiman River, and prevented German establishment of a continuous defense east of the river.¹⁰⁵ A forward detachment of 1st Guards Tank Corps (17th Guards Tank Brigade) unhinged German defenses at Slonim and forced a subsequent German withdrawal toward Brest (Figure 49).¹⁰⁶ Similar actions, in hundreds of instances, permitted Soviet forces to advance over 250 kilometers within two weeks, smash German Army Group Center, and force a painful German withdrawal by late August to the East Prussian border and the Narev River line.

During the L'vov–Sandomierz operation, which began on 12 July 1944, the 1st Ukrainian Front employed forward detachments with equal success. Decisive operations by 3d Guards Tank Army's forward detachments permitted that army to advance precipitously through a narrow penetration sector (the Koltov corridor) toward L'vov. Because of 3d Guards Tank Army's action, the *front* compensated for lack of success in adjacent sectors by throwing a full tank army (4th) and several separate tank corps into the same breach.¹⁰⁷

During the secret commitment of 1st Guards Tank Army to combat further north in the Vladimir-Volynsk sector, a forward detachment played a significant role in deceiving the Germans as to where the Soviet main thrust would occur.¹⁰⁸ The 1st Guards Tank Brigade, which the tank army customarily used as an army or corps forward detachment, advanced into combat just south of Vladimir-Volynsk.



TRANSFER OF THE LINE OF COMMITMENT OF 1ST GUARDS TANK ARMY
(SITUATION ON THE EVENING OF 16.7.44.)

50. L'vov-Sandomierz operation: 1st Guards Tank Army deception plan

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

When German operational reserves (16th and 17th Panzer Divisions) responded in anticipation of 1st Guards Tank Army's appearance in that sector, the army, instead, committed to combat 30 kilometers to the south (Figure 50). 1st Guards Tank Army subsequently split the German defenses and advanced across the Western Bug River, deep into the German rear.

The 1st and 3d Guards Tank Armies' penetration and exploitation collapsed German defenses in southern Poland; and, after heavy fighting in the L'vov region, German forces withdrew toward the Vistula River in a race with exploiting Soviet forces. Forward detachments of 1st Guards Tank Army's corps and of pursuing rifle forces won the race to the Vistula, and forward detachments secured crossings which were later developed by the army's main forces.¹⁰⁹ By early August Soviet forces were firmly lodged into bridgeheads which German counterattacks could not eradicate, and from which Soviet forces would engineer an even more decisive offensive five months later.

Five days after Marshal Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front had struck near L'vov, the left wing of Marshal K. K. Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front launched a major attack from the Kovel' area toward Lublin and the Vistula River. After 8th Guards, 47th, and 69th Armies smashed German tactical defenses, Lieutenant General S. I. Bogdanov's 2d Tank Army joined the fray, fragmenting German defenses across a broad front. Within 24 hours the tank army, followed by the three rifle armies, began a rapid pursuit to the west.

2d Tank Army's two first echelon corps (3d and 16th Tank Corps) led their advance westward with two forward detachments, each consisting of a tank brigade, a self-propelled artillery battalion, two to three automatic weapons companies, and a sapper company.¹¹⁰ The forward detachments seized crossings for the main forces across the Vepsh River, seized Kholm, and assisted in the rapid envelopment and seizure of Lublin. Thereafter, 2d Tank Army, with forward detachments in the lead, advanced to the Vistula River near Magnushev; 69th Army formations on 2d Tank Army's left flank helped clear Lublin of Germans and itself prepared for a dash to the Vistula River. The army's first echelon corps formed forward detachments to lead the advance and secure crossings before German reserves could fortify the river.

The 69th Army's 91st Rifle Corps created a forward detachment consisting of the 2d Battalion, 240th Rifle Regiment mounted on trucks, one artillery battalion, a tank destroyer battalion, and a sapper company, all from the 117th Rifle Division and a self-propelled artillery regiment from corps, all commanded by the 240th Rifle

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

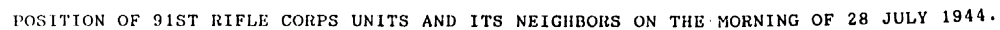
Regiment commander.¹¹¹ The remainder of the corps followed along four march routes. The forward detachment also received all river crossing units available to corps. Reconnaissance units from the corps' divisions fanned out ahead to "capture prisoners on the left bank of the river and determine the nature of the defense and enemy dispositions."¹¹²

At 0600 27 July the forward detachment, mounted on 50 trucks and 14 self-propelled guns, began their advance (Figure 51). The detachment covered the 40 kilometers to the river against light German resistance by 1100 hours 28 July but found the opposite shore in German hands. After shifting positions twice to find an unoccupied sector, it sent a force across the river during the night. The next morning the remainder of the regiment arrived and reinforced the bridgehead. The same procedure applied elsewhere in 69th Army's sector and further north in that of 8th Guards Army.

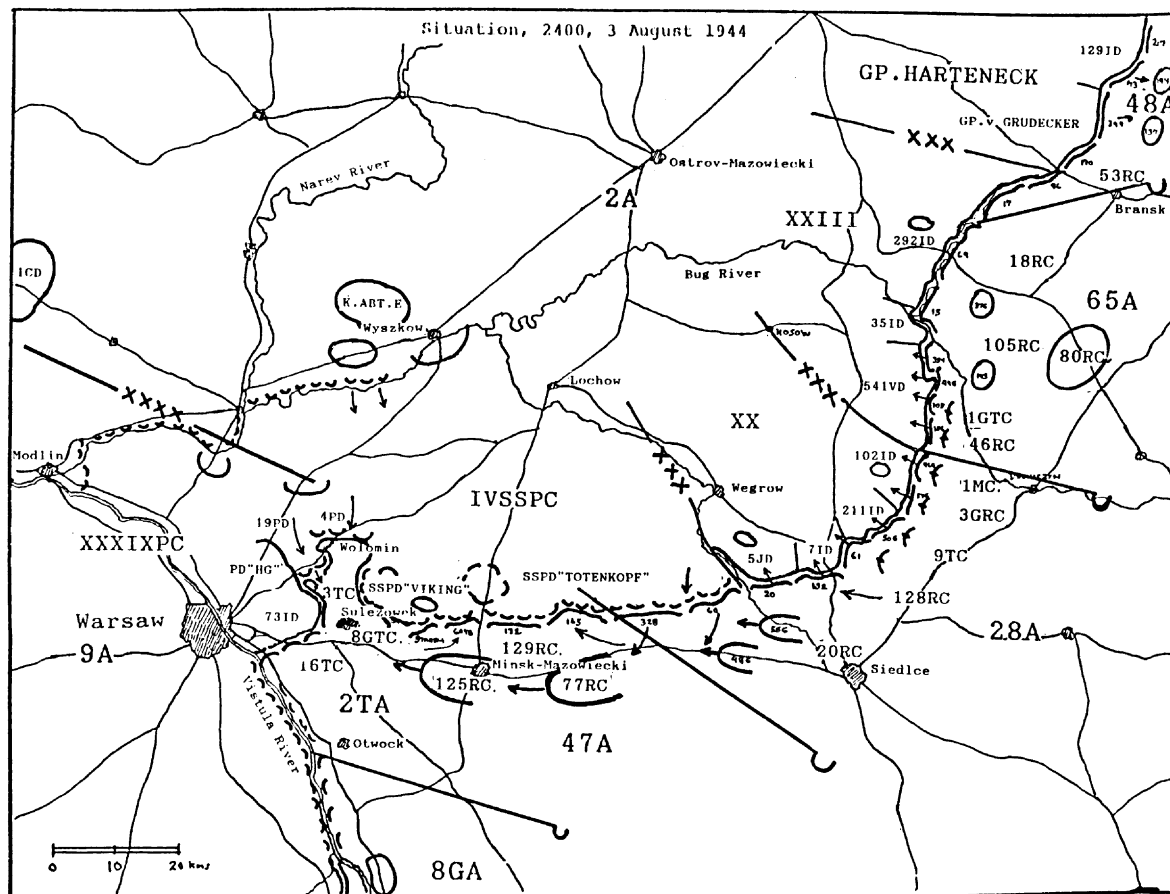
While the two rifle armies reinforced their bridgeheads, 2d Tank Army raced northward east of the river toward Warsaw.¹¹³ Forward detachments led the 3d and 8th Tank Corps in a wide sweep around the single German division defending the southeastern approaches to the city. The 3d Tank Corps' forward detachment seized Volomin and Radzumin, 20 kilometers northeast of Warsaw, and 8th Tank Corps approached to within 10 kilometers of the city's eastern suburb of Praga. However, after 2 August, a well-orchestrated counterstroke by newly arrived XXXXVII Panzer Corps (19th, 6th, and Herman Goering Parachute Panzer Division) and IV SS Panzer Corps manhandled the forward detachments and their parent corps and halted 2d Tank Army's advance (Figure 52). Before that setback, 2d Tank Army had traversed about 300 kilometers in 14 days of almost continuous march. Much of that time forward detachments cleared the way for their parent units.

In late August, the string of successive successful strategic offensives concluded with a mass blow by 2d and 3d Ukrainian Fronts against German Army Group South Ukraine defending Rumania. The well-planned Soviet offensive began on 20 August with penetration operations by both *fronts* in sectors near Iassy and along the Dnestr River south of Bendary.¹¹⁴ Thereafter, mobile forces conducted a shallow envelopment and encirclement of German Sixth Army in the Kishinev area and a deep strategic exploitation by 6th Tank Army directly south toward Bucharest.

Forward detachments played a significant role in the shallow encirclement. Operating at the head of 7th Mechanized Corps and 4th Guards Mechanized Corps of the 2d Ukrainian Front and 18th Tank



51. Lublin–Brest operation: 91st Rifle Corps' crossing of the Vistula River, 27 July 1944



52. Lublin-Brest operation: Situation, 3 August 1944

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

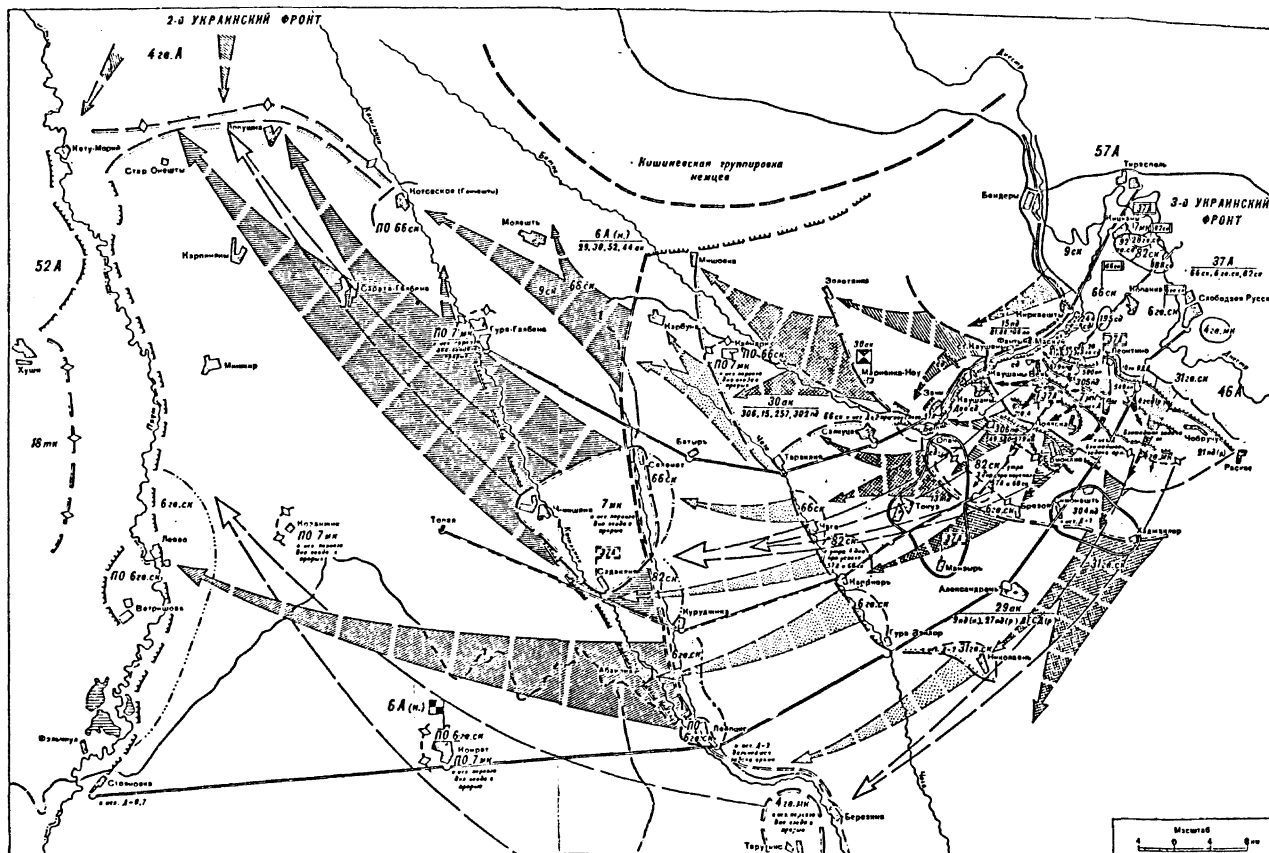
Corps of the 1st Ukrainian Front, they penetrated into German Sixth Army's rear and occupied blocking positions on virtually all axes of withdrawal (Figure 53). Soon the other corps brigades joined them in a hedgehog of strong points that prevented German withdrawal and sealed the fate of Sixth Army.¹¹⁵ Soviet 6th Tank Army likewise employed forward detachments to conduct its advance of more than 250 kilometers toward Bucharest.¹¹⁶ Unlike previous operations, the army and its forward detachments, where possible, bypassed virtually all opposition, making the advance almost continuous. In the course of the operation, German Army Group South Ukraine was virtually destroyed.

The increasing scope and scale of operations during 1944 required and was made possible by extensive use of forward detachments by mobile forces and rifle forces alike. They provided the principal means of rapidly seizing important objectives and intermediate enemy defense lines in the operational depths. They also contributed to the increasing number and scale of encirclements and provided a means for quickly overcoming a variety of natural obstacles.

Forward detachment operations in 1944 were well-planned and usually coordinated at *front* and army level. This centralized control plus the growing experience and, hence, skill of commanders and units contributed to their success. Forward detachment operations occurred on a broad front. Virtually all attacking tank, mechanized, and rifle units used them. This made it possible for forward detachments to coordinate their operations and better achieve specific missions. Their operations in the enemy rear made it more difficult for the enemy to move reserves, particularly laterally, and also confused the enemy regarding where main offensive sectors were located and along which axes the Soviets would develop the offensive. To the missions forward detachments had already performed, were added new ones, including: participation, on a few occasions, in initial assaults, deceiving the enemy, and splitting up withdrawing enemy troops and defeating them in detail.

During 1944 forward detachments became larger and better-balanced combined arms forces. While divisions still employed forward detachments consisting of from two rifle companies to a rifle battalion, several tanks to a tank company, from a battery to a regiment of self-propelled artillery, from a battery to a battalion of artillery, and from a platoon to a company of 82mm mortars, to an increasing extent the detachments contained engineer elements; reconnaissance units; and, in some cases, bridging equipment.

These larger, more numerous detachments operated from as little as



Plan of offensive operations of 37th Army.

53. Iassy-Kishinev operation: 37th Army's offensive plan

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

a few kilometers ahead of their parent force to as far as 30 kilometers. Better radio communications provided for closer coordination with supporting units, particularly air units, and better cooperation with adjacent forward detachments and the main force as well.

The Soviets promptly incorporated lessons learned from combat experience into regulations regarding the use of forward detachments. Whereas the 1943 regulations said little about their use, the 1944 regulations were more specific. The 1944 *Red Army Field Regulation* spoke at length about the critical mission of advance forces in general and stated, "Attacking units try to take individual strong points of the enemy defense from the march using the forces of forward detachments and advance guards, and they shift to preparation of an attack if they establish that the defense is sturdy."¹¹⁷ The regulation went on to define the critical role of forward detachments in river crossing operations, stating, "On approaching a water obstacle, the forward detachments, tank units, and advance guards, with the cooperation of aviation, should seize crossings quickly and suddenly and hold them until the main body arrives."¹¹⁸ It also emphasized the key role of the forward detachment during the pursuit and meeting engagement:

The seizure of favorable lines provides friendly troops with favorable conditions for deployment and is carried out by forward detachments or reinforced advance detachments sent out from various combat arms. Under winter conditions special ski units and formations are employed for this task.

Forward detachments seize and hold lines until the arrival of advance guards, after which they become subordinate to the advance guards.

The dispatch of forward detachments is usually done by divisions (brigades).

Forward detachments of a reinforced make-up sent out by order of the army (corps) commander are organized when it is necessary to seize a favorable line a great distance away and hold it until the arrival of the main body.¹¹⁹

The regulation further stipulated that it was advisable to assign tanks, antitank artillery, and regular artillery to the detachments. In tank and mechanized operations, the regulation declared, "A forward detachment of motorized infantry reinforced by tanks, artillery, and mortars is sent out to seize favorable deployment positions and to support the actions of the tank and mechanized corps' main body."¹²⁰ On the march, the regulation stated:

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Forward detachments, reinforced by tanks, antitank artillery, and combat engineers should be sent out to seize favorable lines, points, and road junctions to hold them until the arrival of the division (brigade) or formation main body.

The strength of a forward detachment depends on the mission assigned it. It can be from a reinforced company (squadron) to a reinforced battalion (two squadrons).¹²¹

The 1944 *Regulation for the Penetration of a Positional Defense* for the first time spelled out the role of forward detachments in such a difficult operation.

Regarding the role of forward detachments in the penetration of the enemy second defense belt, it stated:

Simultaneously with the transition of first echelon units and formations to the pursuit, on order of corps or division commanders, timely, well-prepared mobile forward detachments are sent out. The composition of the forward detachments is to include: one–two rifle battalions (with automatic weapons) on armored vehicles, tanks, or trucks; a battalion–regiment of tanks; a battalion–regiment of artillery with mechanized tractors; sappers; and chemical subunits. A tank brigade can be sent out as a forward detachment, reinforced by self-propelled artillery and with infantry and sappers riding on the tanks. Depending on the width of the offensive sector and the availability of forces and weapons, a division can send out one–two and a corps two–three forward detachments.¹²²

The regulation then specified forward detachment missions during penetration of the tactical zone, stating:

Forward detachments do not get involved in combat with withdrawing enemy units and with his separate strong points, located on the approaches to the second defensive zone.

The basic mission of forward detachments is to secure from the march the most important centers of enemy defense in the second zone and hold them until arrival of the main force.¹²³

The regulation noted that when enemy reserves held the second defensive zone, the penetration should be well planned and carried out as rapidly as possible. Even in these circumstances, it was necessary to send out strong forward detachments “with the mission of rushing on the backs of the withdrawing enemy in his second defensive belt, to

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

seize and hold in it a series of important points until the beginning of the general attack."¹²⁴ These regulations accorded well with procedures used on some occasions in the Belorussian operation and would be applied more extensively in 1945.

After the summer campaign had tapered off in late August and early September, operations subsided a little as the Soviets consolidated their positions and regrouped for an even more decisive offensive early in 1945. In the meantime, throughout October, November, and December, Soviet forces on the main strategic axis through Poland improved their positions along the Narev and Vistula Rivers, in particular the bridgeheads out of which they planned to launch the main strategic thrust. Soviet *fronts* on the northern and southern flanks of the Eastern Front began operations in October that continued to the end of the year to attract German reserves away from the critical central region.

The Soviet High Command planned two major multi-*front* offensives as the nucleus of the winter campaign. The operations, which would incorporate the entire region from Memel' on the Baltic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains, were later named:

Vistula–Oder – 12 January–3 February 1945 (1st Belorussian, 1st Ukrainian Fronts)

East Prussia – 13 January–9 February 1945 (2d Belorussian, 3d Belorussian, and 1st Baltic Fronts)

The two operations began almost simultaneously to place maximum pressure on defending German forces and prevent them from shifting reserves.

There is no operation in the war which better illustrates how forward detachments can be used productively than the Vistula–Oder operation.¹²⁵ During the operation Soviet mobile forces advanced up to 600 kilometers in 17 days, and rifle forces were able to maintain close coordination with those exploiting forces throughout the operation. This was a direct result of forward detachment operations.

Forward detachments played a significant role in the initial penetration phase, in the subsequent exploitation, in penetration of German intermediate defense lines, and in securing bridgeheads across the Oder River. The two Soviet *fronts* each employed two tank armies and two to three separate tank corps: the tank armies as *front* mobile groups and the corps as army mobile groups. Each tank army, its component corps, the separate tank corps, and most component brigades employed forward detachments. These ranged in size from reinforced tank battalions to reinforced tank brigades; and they

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

operated an average of 40–60 kilometers ahead of their parent forces, sometimes as far as 100 kilometers.

In addition, after the initial penetration, most rifle armies, rifle corps, and rifle divisions also created forward detachments of reinforced battalion, regiment, or tank brigade size. All forward detachments were designated in advance, and each was carefully tailored with supporting forces suited to its mission.

The two Soviet *fronts* conducted their penetration operations differently. Marshal Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front, attacking on 14 January from the smaller Magnushev and Pulavy bridgeheads, employed rifle forces to penetrate German tactical defenses. Tank regiments and brigades, designated as the nucleus of forward detachments, assisted in the penetration and then commenced the exploitation as forward detachments;¹²⁶ 1st Guards and 2d Guards Tank Armies entered the bridgehead late on the first day and on the second day, and began their commitment to combat sequentially. Each tank army led with a forward detachment for each first echelon corps. Katukov's 1st Guards Tank Army designated 1st Guards and 44th Guards Tank Brigades as forward detachments because of their extensive prior experience in operating far in advance of the main force.¹²⁷ The two tank armies entered combat on the second and third day of the operation, from the march, with the forward detachments in advance. After the two armies had passed through the advancing infantry, they remained far in front throughout the duration of the operation.

To maintain coordination between these mobile forces and the main rifle force, each of Zhukov's rifle armies created an army forward detachment to advance on the heels of the tank army's main body. For example, 69th Army formed an army forward detachment consisting of the 1006th Rifle Regiment on trucks of the 41st Automobile Regiment, 220th Separate Tank Brigade, 89th Separate Tank Regiment (heavy), 507th Tank Destroyer Regiment, self-propelled artillery, antiaircraft and mortar battalions, a guards mortar (MRL) battalion, and several sapper companies.¹²⁸ The detachment maintained close liaison with the tank armies throughout the advance. In sectors where separate tank corps operated as mobile groups, rifle armies created similar forward detachments.

Marshal Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front, attacking on 12 January from the larger Sandomierz bridgehead, organized his offensive differently. His two tank armies (3d Guards, 4th Guards) and separate tank corps (25th, 31st, 4th Guards) were all located in the bridgeheads and deployed behind his attacking rifle armies.¹²⁹ Konev's tank armies formed with their two forward detachments arrayed within the

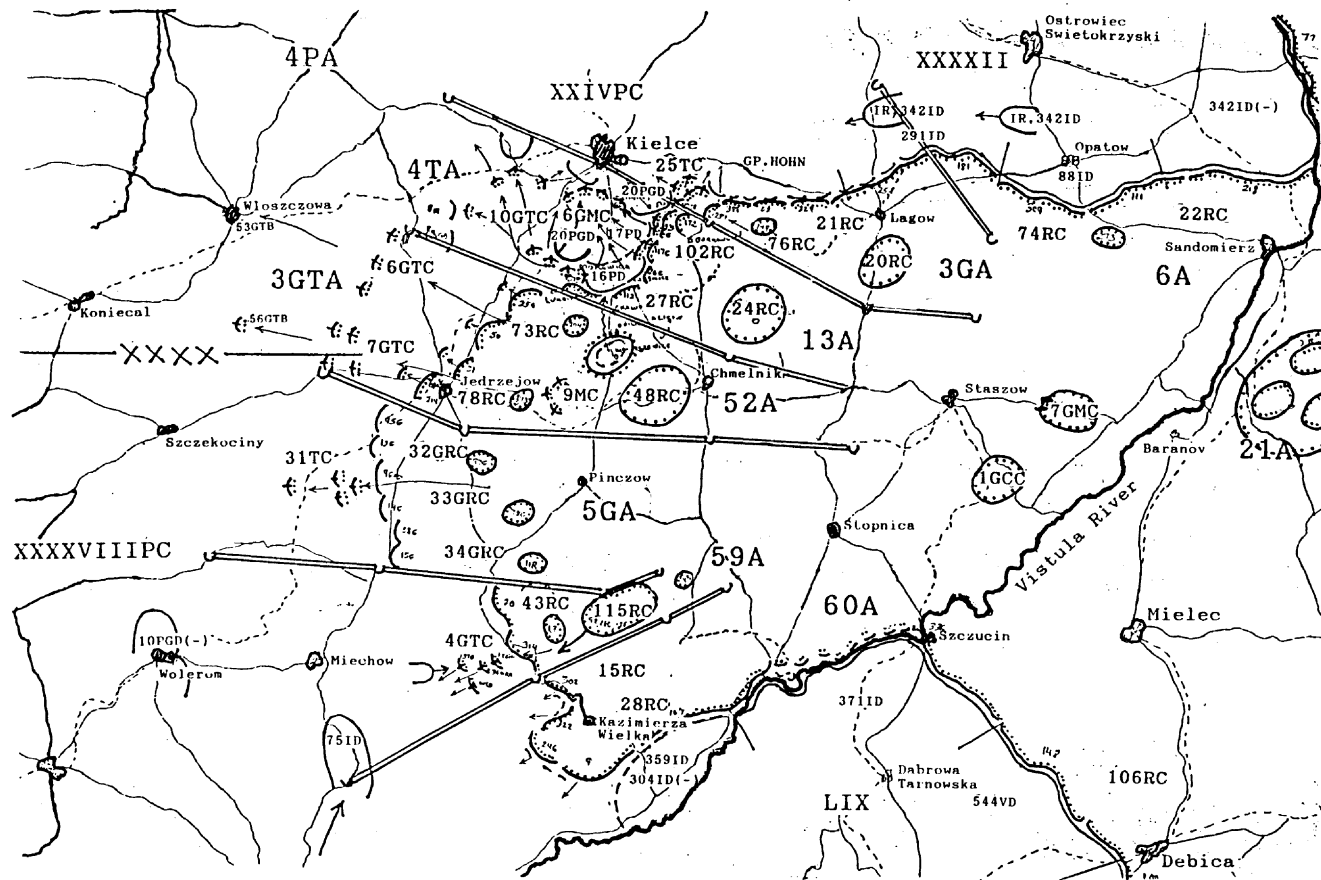
THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

operational formation of main attack armies. They both participated in the assault and began the exploitation. In fact, Konev's entire operational and tactical maneuver force joined the initial assault at about mid-day on the first day of operations to produce maximum initial damage on the Germans and generate tremendous early momentum. Although not recommended by regulations, his tank armies and corps, in effect, created as well as exploited the initial penetration.

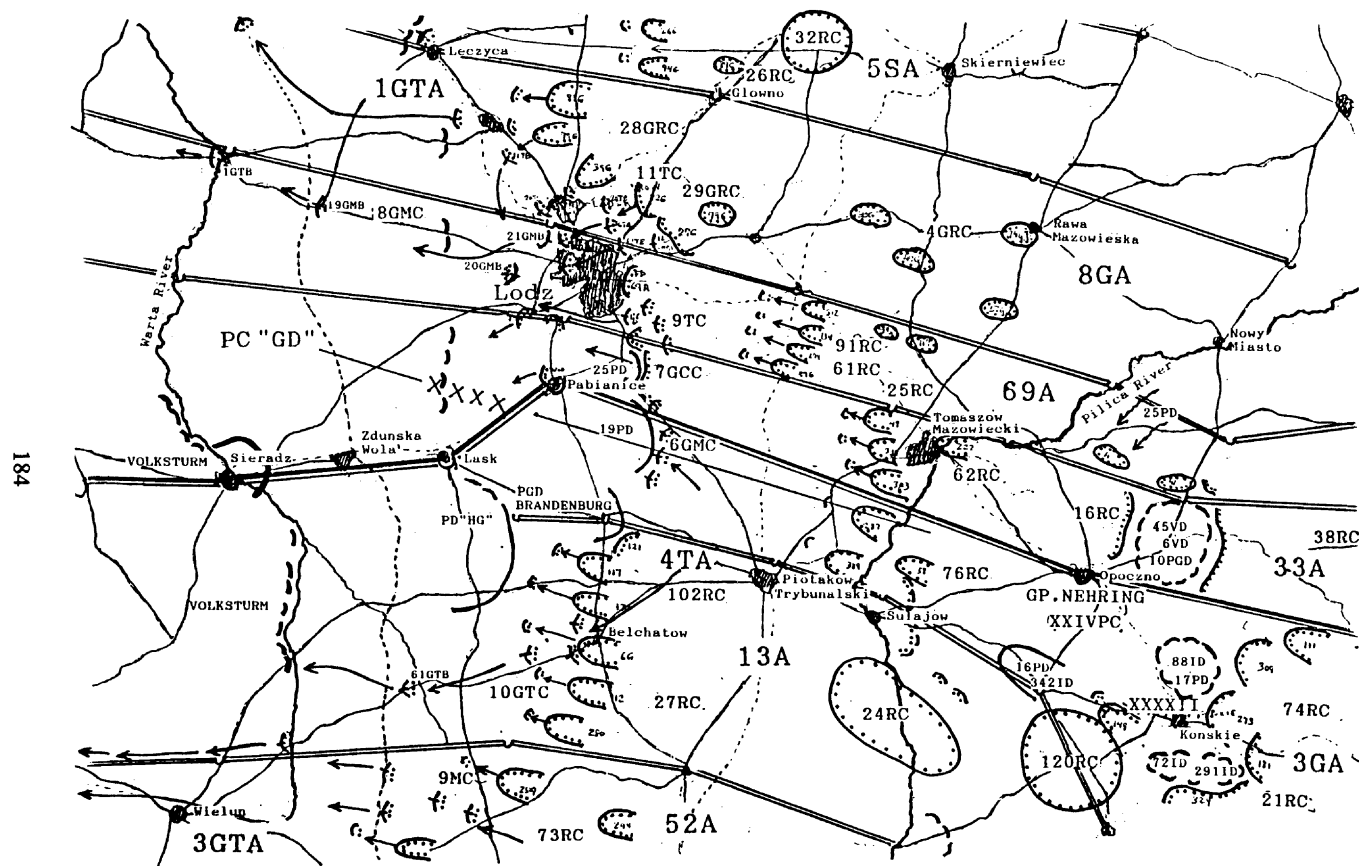
Konev's devastating initial blow crushed strong German tactical reserves as well as the main defense zone. German 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions, with as many as 200 tanks each, were caught up in the flood of Soviet armor, immediately lost their command and control, suffered staggering losses, and fought thereafter as battalion-size fragments of their former selves.¹³⁰ Within 24 hours, 3d Guards Tank Army began a rapid exploitation westward toward Czeszochowa, with forward detachments in the lead (Figure 54). Meanwhile, 4th Tank Army chopped up German concentrations near Kielce, using its forward detachments to maneuver through the gaps and against the flanks and rear of fragmented or isolated German forces. After 48 hours of heavy fighting, German resistance crumbled and 4th Tank Army joined the pursuit northwestward. Its commander, Lieutenant General D. D. Leliushenko, employed an army forward detachment (93d Guards Tank Brigade) in addition to those of his corps.¹³¹ Thereafter the two tank armies and separate tank corps of Konev's *front* led the advance westward.

During the pursuit phase of the operation, forward detachments of the tank armies and separate tank corps pre-empted German establishment of new defense lines, defeated German reserves, seized key objectives and crossings over obstacles (rivers), and, later in the offensive, helped penetrate partially occupied German defensive regions along the old German-Polish border, where the Germans hoped to halt the Soviet advance.

The 1st Guards Tank Army's 1st Guards Tank Brigade (8th Guards Mechanized Corps), assisted by 11th Guards Tank Corps' 44th Guards Tank Brigade, enveloped German defenses at Lodz and secured crossings over the Warta River, thwarting German efforts to erect defenses in both regions (Figure 55).¹³² 4th Tank Army's 61st Guards Tank Brigade (10th Guards Tank Corps) seized Warta River crossings south of Lodz and, with the 93d Guards Tank Brigade and 17th Mechanized Brigade (6th Guards Mechanized Corps), later secured crossings over the Oder River near Keben (Figure 56).¹³³ The 3d Guards Tank Army used its forward detachments to maneuver and



54. Vistula—Oder operation: Situation, 14 January 1945



55. Vistula-Oder operation: Situation, 19 January 1945

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

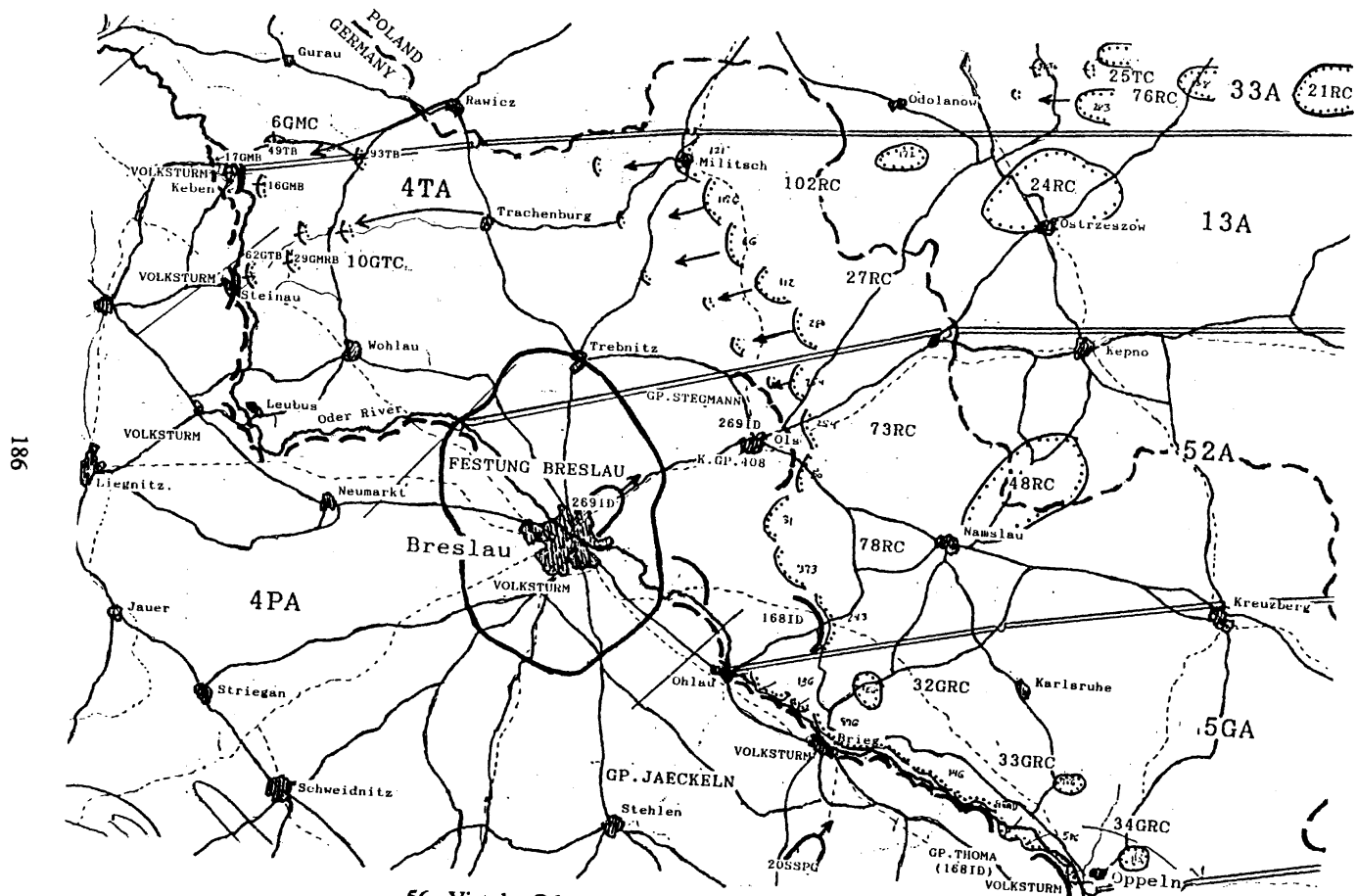
secure Czesochowa and pushed on rapidly toward Breslau. On 20 January, while on the march to Breslau, Rybalko, the tank army commander, was ordered to turn his army 90 degrees and attack southward toward Oppeln' to strike the rear of German forces defending in the Katowice area. Rybalko allowed his original forward detachments to continue to portray an intent to advance west, while overnight (in a matter of hours) he formed new detachments and sent them south, followed shortly by the remainder of the army.¹³⁴

During late January 2d Guards Tank Army's forward detachments swept to the outskirts of Kuestrin and seized small Oder River bridgeheads.¹³⁵ Further south, 1st Guards Tank Army used forward detachments (44th Guards Tank Brigade, 1st Guards Tank Brigade) to maneuver through the Mezeretz fortified region (Figure 57).¹³⁶ All along the front, but particularly along the Oder River, forward detachments of rifle armies, corps, and divisions drove forward and seized innumerable river crossings. Eventually, these coalesced into larger bridgeheads from which later offensives were launched.

Forward detachments enabled Soviet forces to maintain advance rates of over 30 kilometers per day in most sectors. More important, the array of forward detachments linked the mobile and not-so-mobile segments of the advancing Soviet force and created out of it a cohesive mutually supporting whole.

After completion of the Vistula–Oder and East Prussian operations, the Soviet High Command halted its forces along the lower Oder River and, throughout February and March, conducted operations to clear their flanks in anticipation of the final drive on Berlin. That drive materialized on 16 April with the commencement of the Berlin operation. In the Berlin operation and the Prague operation which followed, the Soviets employed forward detachments as they had during the Vistula–Oder operation. They learned, however, during the drive on Berlin, that adjustments would have to be made in order to conduct successful operational and tactical maneuver in the more highly broken, wooded, and urbanized terrain of central Europe.

In the Berlin operation, Marshal Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front had the honor of advancing directly from its Oder River bridgeheads on Berlin.¹³⁷ Zhukov amassed an immense force including two full tank armies (1st and 2d Guards) to conduct the assault. He planned to commit the tank armies late on the first day of operations and employ classic maneuver with forward detachments to overcome German defenses. However, the stoutness and depth of German defenses, organized largely around village strongpoints and dominant terrain features, thwarted Zhukov's plan. In the end, Zhukov's forces had to



56. Vistula-Oder operation: Situation, 24 January 1945

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

187

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

conduct a prolonged penetration operation all the way to Berlin – a slow and costly process where mobile armored assets chiefly provided infantry support. The 1st Ukrainian Front, attacking in a less built up sector, successfully used the former maneuver techniques.

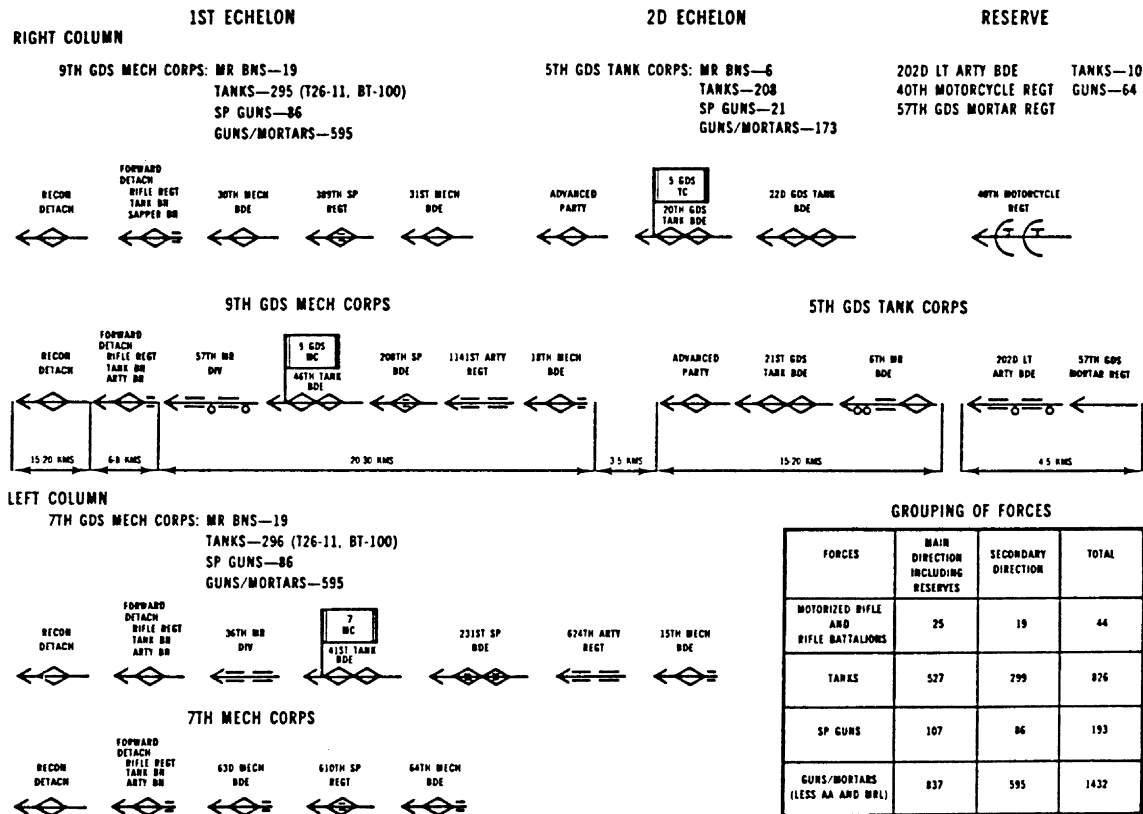
The lesson the Soviets derived from this experience was that new combined arms combinations were required both to conduct the penetration and initiate pursuit.¹³⁸ Ultimately the Soviets tested new force combinations in Manchuria which led to the post-war conversion of tank forces into mechanized forces.

After the end of the Great Patriotic War in the West, the Soviets turned their attention to participation in the war against Japan. At the request of the US, the Soviets planned and conducted the Manchurian operation in August 1945 against the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria.¹³⁹ The peculiarities of the political situation and factors of time, geography, and the Japanese defenses made it imperative the operation be a quick one. High offensive tempo was the key requirement; and, in their planning, the Soviets employed every technique they had learned in the West to achieve that goal. One of the most important techniques was the conduct, within the context of strategic surprise, of operational and tactical maneuver, as early and as extensively as possible.

Soviet emphasis on high speed penetration and pursuit operations reinforced the effectiveness of Soviet maneuver and compounded Japanese surprise. Speed was necessary to forestall Japanese erection of credible defenses and guarantee Soviet occupation of Manchuria, southern Sakhalin Island, and the Kurile Islands before total Japanese capitulation. The Soviets achieved a high tempo advance by using a disproportionate number of tank and mechanized units in first echelon as mobile groups or as forward detachments. Wherever possible, they tailored these units as better combined arms forces based on their experiences of the Berlin operation. The Trans-Baikal Front employed 6th Guards Tank Army in first echelon to pre-empt Japanese defenses in western Manchuria by speedy passage of the Grand Khingan Mountains. The 61st Tank Division performed a similar role in the sector of 39th Army.

The most important means used by the Soviets to achieve high rates of advance was their extensive employment of forward detachments. Forward detachments throughout the operation operated at depths of from 10–50 kilometers and separated from one another by from 20–80 kilometers. These detachments were accorded tremendous freedom of action as well. At *front* level, 6th Guards Tank Army formed forward detachments to lead the operation of each of its first echelon mobile

6TH GUARDS TANK ARMY: MARCH FORMATION



58. Manchurian operation: 6th Guards Tank Army march formation

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

corps (Figure 58). The 61st Tank Division functioned as 39th Army's forward detachment and enveloped the Japanese Halung-Arshaan Fortified Zone from the south. Similarly, 36th Army used the reinforced 205th Tank Brigade to attack and penetrate Japanese defenses at Hailar, the 5th Army employed the reinforced 76th Tank Brigade to pre-empt successive Japanese defense lines on the road to Mutanchiang, and 15th Army used the 171st Tank Brigade to lead the ground advance on Fuchin and Chiamussu. The 25th Army also employed the 10th Mechanized Corps, led by two forward detachments, in its advance to Wangchin and beyond. Often the forward detachments were the only force in contact with the enemy.

At corps and division level a similar pattern of usage emerged. Corps normally formed reinforced tank brigades as forward detachments (Figure 59). As a result of the Berlin experience, they added medium or heavy self-propelled gun regiments to protect the tanks and reduce stubborn enemy defenses. The corps of 6th Guards Tank Army used a reinforced tank regiment or battalion as their forward detachment. Rifle divisions operating on main attack axes usually initially employed a separate tank brigade and heavy self-propelled artillery regiments as forward detachments. Thereafter these divisions, and divisions on secondary axes, formed forward detachments from organic assets including their own rifle units and self-propelled artillery battalions. These detachments were carefully tailored to suit the terrain across which they operated and the strength of the enemy they opposed.

36th Army Forward Detachment: Maj. Gen. V. A. Burmasov

205th Tank Brigade: Lt. Col. N. A. Kurnosov
152d Rifle Regiment (94th Rifle Division)—on trucks
158th Tank Destroyer Battalion
1st Battalion, 32d Guards Mortar Regiment
97th Light Artillery Regiment
791st SP Artillery Battalion (SU-76), 94th Rifle Division
465th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
1st Battalion, 176th Mortar Regiment
1st Company, 124th Sapper Battalion

59. Manchurian operation: 36th Army forward detachment

In Manchuria, forward detachments operated in great numbers at every level of command with tremendous effect (figure 60). They perpetuated the momentum of initial assaults and created a momentum

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

Types of Soviet Forward Detachments in Manchuria

Command Level at Which the Forward Detachment Operates				
	Army	Corps		Division
36th Army	205th Tank Bde 152d Motorized Rifle Regt 97th Artillery Regt 491st SP Bn 465th Antiaircraft Regt 32d Guards Mortar Regt (1 battalion) 1 sapper co 1 mortar bn 158th Antitank Bn			
39th Army	61st Tank Div 53d Antitank Bde 1st Howitzer Bde 11th Guards Mortar Bde 203d Engineer Sapper Bde	44th Tank Bde (+)	206th Tank Bde (+)	1 rifle bn 1 SP bn 1—2 artillery bn 1 antitank bn 1 guards mortar bn
25th Army	259th Tank Bde (+)			
15th Army	171st Tank Bde 1 rifle bn			
2d Red Banner Army	74th Tank Bde 1 rifle co 1 artillery bn 1 antitank regt	258th Tank Bde 1 rifle bn 1 mortar regt		
5th Separate Rifle Corps		172d Tank Bde 1 rifle bn 1 antitank regt 1 sapper co/bn		
17th Army	70th Tank Bn 56th Antitank Bde Training Bn, 209th Rifle Div	82d Tank Bn 482d SP Bn		
Cavalry-Mechanized Group	25th Mechanized Bde 43d Tank Bde 267th Tank Regt	27th Motorized Rifle Bde 7th Armored Car Bde 30th Motorcycle Regt		
6th Guards Tank Army	1 tank bn 1 rifle regt 1 artillery bn	1 tank regt 1 rifle regt 1 artillery bn		
	1 tank bn 1 rifle regt 1 SP bn			
1st Red Banner Army		1 tank bde 1 SP btry 1 sapper plt	1 rifle bn with 5 T-34s 2 automatic weapons co 1 sapper plt	
5th Army	76th Tank Bde 478th Heavy SP Regt 2 rifle bn			1 tank bde 1 heavy SP regt 1 rifle regt/bn 1 antitank btry 1 sapper co
10th Mechanized Corps		72d Mechanized Bde 1419th SP Regt 2d Guards Mortar Bn	72d Tank Bde 2d Motorcycle Regt	

60. Manchurian operation: Forward detachments employed

of their own which tended to paralyze enemy command and control. Once created, they imparted that momentum to army and *front* operations as a whole. As a result, in Manchuria, forward detachments' actions had operational as well as tactical significance.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the Second World War the Soviets developed a capability for conducting large-scale operational maneuver, conditioned in part by skillful employment of tactical maneuver forces. While the expanded role of mobile groups in offensive operations was the most important advance in Soviet military art and has recently received the attention it deserves, the Soviet tactical maneuver advances have been largely ignored. Yet it was the Soviet ability to conduct tactical maneuver that paved the way for the larger scale success.

Building on fairly sophisticated pre-war theory, the Soviets slowly formed the forces and discovered techniques suited to the conduct of tactical maneuver in a variety of circumstances. During the war years, and particularly from 1943 to 1945, Soviet tank, mechanized, and rifle formations employed forward detachments extensively in all types of combat, but especially while developing offensives into the operational depth of enemy defenses.

During penetration operations, by war's end, forward detachments, designated in advance, deployed into action to secure key sectors within the enemy's tactical defense. Often they assisted rifle forces initially and then began the operational exploitation. In the depths of enemy defenses, they seized important objectives or positions, disrupted the coherence of the defense, pursued withdrawing enemy units to prevent systematic withdrawal, secured crossing sites and bridgeheads across water obstacles on the march, and conducted raids behind enemy lines. On occasion they served to deceive the enemy regarding offensive intentions. They contributed to a marked increase in offensive tempo and propelled offensives to ever-increasing depths. Finally they created conditions for conducting offensives with the least expenditure of forces and resources and with reduced human loss.

The composition of forward detachments changed significantly during the war. Beginning as company and battalion-size infantry forces in 1941, by war's end they were of reinforced brigade and regiment size. Their mobility improved as tank forces provided their nucleus and as requisite motor transport became available. Additional support in the form of self-propelled artillery, tank destroyer elements, antiaircraft elements, sappers, and, finally, even bridging assets increased their survivability, sustainability, and range. The increased number of detachments provided for better coordinated operations across the front. By war's end, they were carefully tailored to perform

EVOLUTION OF THE FORWARD DETACHMENT

particular missions in specific circumstances. All this permitted them to operate at greater depth and more independently.

Forward detachments routinely spearheaded mobile force operations in brigade strength in groups of two or three for tank armies and one or two for separate mobile groups. In addition to facilitating operations by their parent formations, by 1945 individual forward detachments often performed missions of operational scale. Once sufficient transport assets became available, forward detachments of similar size served rifle armies and corps in similar ways while also providing a means for coordinating the operations of mobile and rifle forces.

In specific offensive operations, forward detachments were normally designated in advance. On some occasions, however, Soviet commanders designated forward detachments during an operation from those formations operating most successfully. This permitted forward detachments to break away from their parent force and project force more rapidly into the depths. These subunits normally came from first echelon formations.

Increasingly centralized planning for initial forward detachment operations provided unity of purpose among the forward detachments in the critical initial stages of operations and when the penetration operation transformed itself into an operational exploitation. Once in the operational depth, subordinate formations used forward detachments flexibly to take advantage of the rapidly changing combat situation. Individual initiative by forward detachment commanders within the overall guidance of the plan grew throughout the war and contributed to the detachments' success.

With these and other improvements, the range of forward detachment operations increased, as did the operational range of mobile groups. In turn, these ranges were reflected in the scope of planning for new offensives.

In short, successful operations by forward detachments became the principal reason for mobile force success. Skillful tactical and operational maneuver by forward detachments and mobile groups contributed to the growing offensive success of the Red Army as a whole.

CHAPTER 7

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

THE AFTERMATH OF WAR: 1946–1960

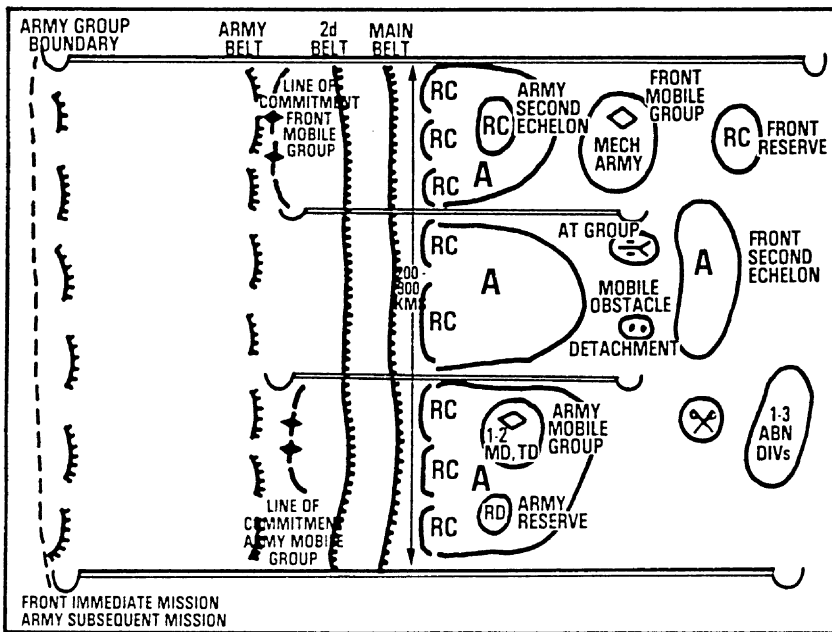
Immediately after the war, the Soviets, in the midst of a wholesale demobilization, reorganized their army force structure to suit the realities of the post-war years. The ensuing major restructuring was carried out on the basis of lessons learned in the last year of war to create a new Soviet Army capable of conducting war as required by new political realities and in a new environment, that of central Europe. Thus the experiences of the Berlin operation had a strong impact on the nature of the restructuring.

The Berlin operation and experiences elsewhere had indicated the force structure was too tank-heavy and that it lacked the combined arms balance necessary to fight successfully in more heavily forested, urbanized, and hilly central Europe.¹ Post-war restructuring sought to remedy these problems while preserving the basic operational and tactical techniques which had produced victory in 1945.

During 1946 the Soviets dropped the nomenclature tank army, tank corps, and mechanized corps and renamed these formations mechanized armies, tank divisions, and mechanized divisions. The name change of the former signified a shift in balance away from the tank-heavy army of 1943 with two tank corps and one mechanized corps to the new mechanized army of two tank and two mechanized divisions.² The new tank and mechanized divisions were also better balanced combined arms entities with more extensive integrated support.³ The new force structure generally incorporated into unit TOEs those subunits which had been routinely attached in 1945. The new rifle corps included a mechanized division; and the new rifle division incorporated a medium tank/self-propelled gun regiment consisting of 52 tanks and 16 self-propelled guns. The latter closely resembled the forward detachments which had served rifle corps and rifle divisions in 1945.⁴ These had consisted of a separate tank brigade of 65 tanks and a self-propelled artillery regiment of 21 self-propelled guns.

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

This force restructuring was designed to create forces which could carry out those important combat functions which had proved so critical in achieving victory in the war. In fact, all Soviet military art in the immediate post-war years reflected concepts prevalent in the last period of war, particularly battle-proven concepts for conducting large-scale operational and tactical maneuver. The new mechanized armies, operating singly or in pairs, served as mobile groups for *front* commanders to exploit offensive success into the operational depth (Figure 61). The separate tank and mechanized divisions performed the same function for army commanders. A mechanized division assigned to corps served a dual purpose, as a reinforced forward detachment or as a corps mobile force to complete the tactical penetration and initiate the exploitation into the operational depths.



61. Front operational formation, 1946–53

The function of forward detachments remained as it had been in the last period of war with only minor changes. The Soviets concluded that the depth of tactical defenses had increased from 15–20 kilometers to 20–25 kilometers and the density of defending personnel and weaponry

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

had also increased by 50 to 100 percent.⁵ These factors, plus improved fortifications and more difficult terrain, required a more prolonged penetration operation. Thus the fire and combat strength of penetrating forces had to be stronger as well. The new, heavier mechanized forces appeared to satisfy this requirement.

Forward detachments could still be used in the penetration operation but with some changes in procedure. Since the forward movement of tanks into attack positions one to three kilometers behind advancing forces was often an attack indicator which forfeited the possibility of achieving surprise, now tanks assembled 6–8 kilometers to the rear and advanced forward into attack positions during the artillery and air preparation of the assault.⁶ Following the preparation, tank subunits attacked from the march in close coordination with infantry and artillery. Against a hasty defense, the tank subunit, operating with a reconnaissance element in advance, attacked from the march.

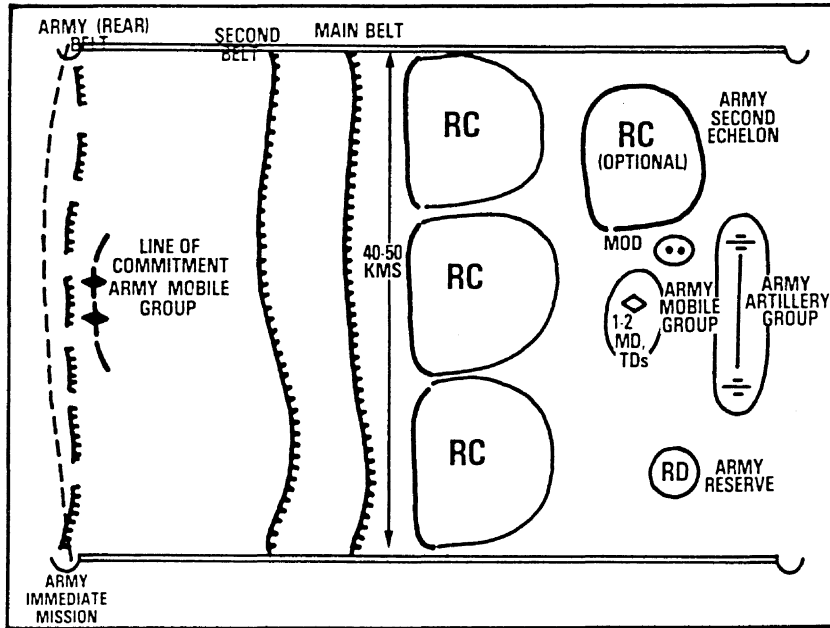
Within combined armies, Soviet rifle corps conducted the penetration operation with their rifle divisions supported by a mechanized or tank division (Figure 62). The latter provided close infantry support or conducted independent exploitation of the infantry's success. In the absence of a tank or mechanized division:

The planning for the capture of the second defense zone from the march falls to the forward detachment. The forces and composition of such forward detachments consist of a tank battalion or battalions of self-propelled guns with infantry mounted on the machines, and with engineers. The tanks and self-propelled guns are detached for this purpose from the group for close support of infantry. The action of the forward detachments in the depths of the defense of the enemy should be supported by the artillery of the rifle division and corps groups.⁷

The time of forward detachments' commitment depended on the strength of the enemy defense and actual combat conditions. Against a well-prepared defense, forward detachments were used only after corps' combined arms forces had made major progress through the enemy tactical defense. "In case of a favorable situation," however, "the tank division or the forward detachment may be thrown forward before the completion of the penetration of the main [defense] zone."⁸

Within the rifle corps, the rifle division created an armored group of one or two tank regiments and, if adequate tanks were available, an armored reserve. The armored group consisted of two echelons: the first with medium and mine-clearing tanks; and the second with heavy tanks, self-propelled guns, and flame thrower tanks. Separated by no

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985



62. Army operation formation, 1946–53

more than 100–400 meters, the two tank echelons supported infantry in the penetration. If the penetration succeeded, these tanks formed the entire forward detachment. The armored reserve, consisting of a tank battalion and one or two companies of self-propelled artillery “exploit the already achieved success, support the second echelon combined arms echelon, and repel counterattacks of enemy tanks and infantry.”⁹

Forward detachments still played a significant role during the pursuit. Once the enemy tactical defense was penetrated, “the corps passes to vigorous pursuit, deploying in columns, and detailing pursuit forward detachments which receive deep missions for the capture and holding of defiles, road centers, crossings, etc., important local objectives, and strong points of the enemy prepared for defense.”¹⁰ These forward detachments, as in the war years, provided a coordinating link between exploiting combined arms forces and mobile groups conducting operational maneuver.

In the corps attack sector, after it breaks through the second defense zone, one may commit in the penetration an army or *front*

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

mobile group. The corps, after detailing the forward detachments and advancing quickly behind the large mobile units, destroys the surviving centers, fortified localities captured, and also conducts battle against counter-attacking enemy operational reserves which are approaching.¹¹

Mobile groups, during their commitment to combat and exploitation into the operational depths, relied heavily on forward detachments. During preparation for the exploitation, the commander of the mobile group was responsible for "working out the operations of the forward detachment on the terrain" and appointing "the most experienced officers" to command forward detachments.¹² During exploitation, the mobile group employed combat reconnaissance parties and advance tank units reinforced by combat engineers, self-propelled guns, and mortars, which were formed in such a manner that "they could be used at any moment as a forward detachment or for covering the deployment of the columns."¹³ The forward elements sent out advance parties as well.

Western assessments noted Soviet use of forward detachments but tended to treat forward detachments and advance guards as similar organizations. A 1948 British assessment listed the following missions of the advance guards:

- (a) Capture and holding tactical features until the arrival of the main forces,
- (b) shielding the advance of the main force,
- (c) reconnaissance to find out the composition, grouping, and general condition of the enemy, also the nature of his field-works and defenses,
- (d) information and detail of enemy reinforcements,
- (e) capture of aerodromes.¹⁴

After lumping together a variety of combat, security, and reconnaissance functions, the same assessment noted:

The advance is carried out in bounds, from one tactical objective to the next. Advanced [forward] detachments are occasionally sent forward to seize and hold specific features until the arrival of the vanguard. These objectives may be road junctions, natural obstacles, and defiles.¹⁵

Regarding the strength and disposition of these advance units, it stated, "Advance guards will normally be portions of either tank, or

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

mechanized divisions, though occasions may arise when the leading formation may be from a rifle or cavalry division.”¹⁶ It assessed that a leading mechanized division formed a vanguard consisting of a motorized rifle battalion with artillery, tanks, self-propelled guns, and mortars attached. A tank division, in the same circumstances, employed a medium tank battalion, reinforced by an infantry company, a self-propelled artillery detachment or antitank guns, and engineers. Most infantry rode on the tanks to be able to provide more rapid support.

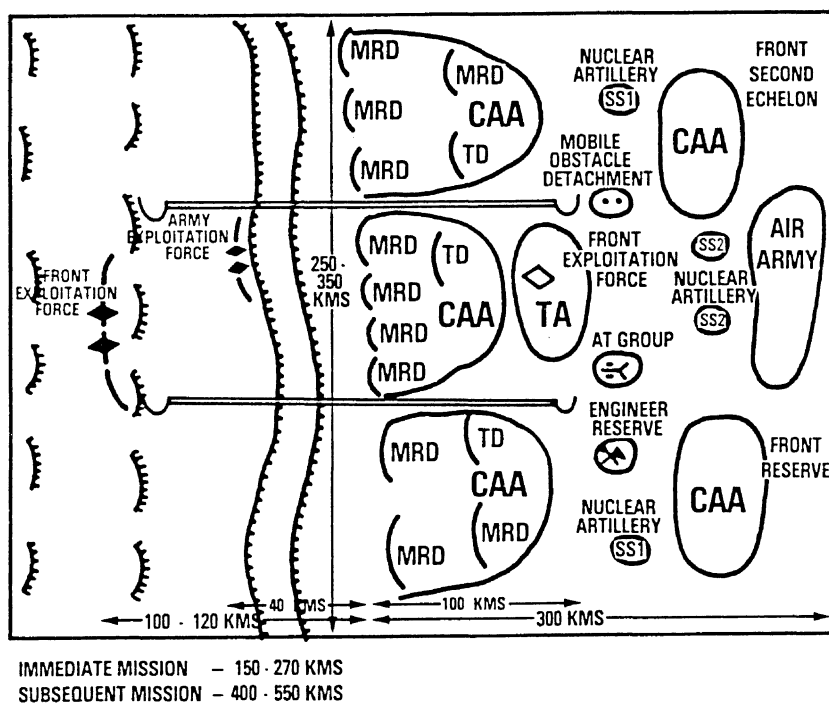
The British assessment also detected Soviet use of forward detachments to secure passages over obstacles, stating, “During an advance to contact, or a pursuit, armored and motorized units are sent on ahead of the main forces to seize bridgeheads, supported by artillery and aircraft. Airborne units may be used.”¹⁷

After Stalin’s death in 1953, particularly between 1956 and 1958 when Marshals Zhukov and R. Ia. Malinovsky were Soviet defense ministers, the Soviet High Command again restructured their forces, this time to mechanize and motorize all elements of the force and to tailor it to fight and survive in an atomic environment. The Soviets replaced their large mechanized armies with smaller tank armies and both the mechanized and rifle division with motorized rifle divisions.¹⁸ The new force was more mobile, less vulnerable to atomic attack than the more ponderous mechanized forces, but still strong enough in infantry, tanks, and artillery to engage in intense conventional combat.

Basic operational and tactical combat techniques did not change significantly after 1956. The new tank armies served as *front* exploitation forces, and the refurbished tank divisions did the same for the army commanders (Figures 63–64). Because “mobile groups” were superfluous now that all forces were mobile, the Soviets ceased using the term. While tank armies and divisions conducted operational maneuver, forward detachments conducted tactical maneuver for tank forces, combined arms armies, and motorized rifle divisions alike. Likewise, forward detachments participated in penetration operations, in particular against hasty defenses, and in the exploitation and pursuit phase of operations.

Some operational and tactical indices did change, although “troops were guided by previous regulations and manuals. Therefore no fundamental change occurred in views or employment of tank units and subunits in penetrating a defense.”¹⁹ The advent of atomic weaponry and other new weapons, however, “resulted in increased depth and content of combat missions when tank units and subunits were fighting in a sector where nuclear strikes were delivered.”²⁰

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

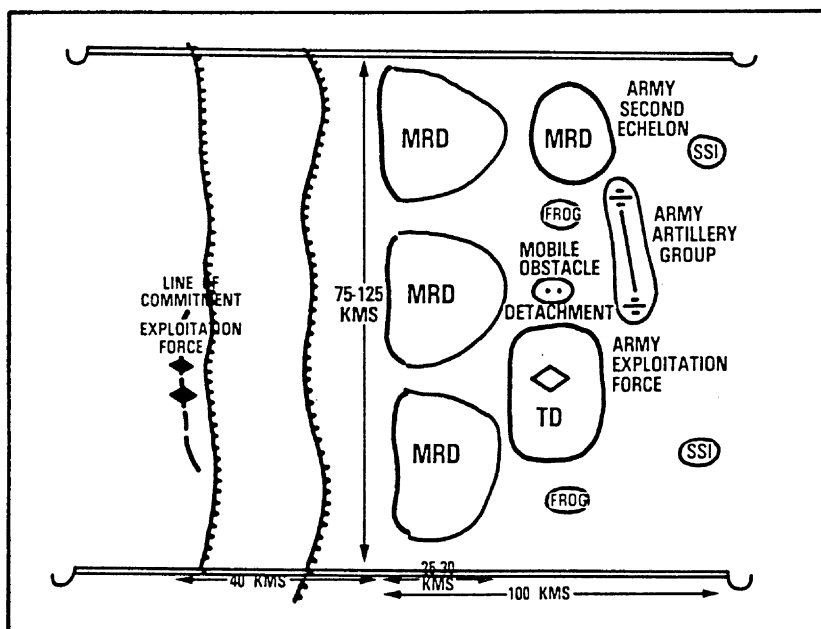


63. Front operation formation, 1958-62

After 1957, forward detachments serving tank and combined arms forces played a continued role in penetration operations and an ever more decisive role in exploitation and pursuit. Although their composition varied, the Soviets began emphasizing the utility of tank subunits in the tactical maneuver role because they were better able to survive the effects of improved weaponry. They also stressed tailoring of the forward detachments with an increasing array of support units to improve both sustainability and survivability. Generally tank battalions, and sometimes regiments, served as forward detachments of tank armies while tank, and sometimes motorized rifle battalions, performed the function for combined arms armies and motorized rifle divisions. These forward detachments operated to greater depths and at higher tempos than their predecessors.

In the late 1950s the Soviets published several in-depth studies of

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985



IMMEDIATE MISSION - 70 KMS
SUBSEQUENT MISSION - 270 KMS

64. Army operation formation, 1958–62

tactical operations of the Great Patriotic War to provide experiences upon which contemporary training could be based. The introduction to one such study noted, "... experience acquired by our army in the years of the past war has the highest value for Soviet military art and its capability to study comprehensively that which can be creatively used in contemporary, new conditions of conducting operations. ..."²¹ Among the many topics addressed in detail by these works was the role of forward detachments in conducting tactical maneuver in a variety of tactical and operational situations.

Foreign analyses continued to echo, although somewhat weakly, Soviet use of forward detachments. One analysis of Soviet regimental operations noted that Soviet medium tank regiments, although designed to operate as an integral part of a motorized rifle division, could carry out independent missions. Specifically, "elements of the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

regiment may be employed to reinforce the motorized rifle regiments of the division or to form the armor component of task force-type formations such as a forward detachment (*peredavoi otryad*), reconnaissance group, or advance guard.²² Among the regiments' missions were to:

- (1) Operate as a covering force for the division in either offensive or defensive operations;
- (2) attack in the first echelon of the division to overcome hasty defenses or to exploit nuclear strikes;
- (3) exploit penetrations created by motorized rifle regiments to seize objectives deep in the division's zone of advance;
- (4) spearhead the division's advance in pursuing a withdrawing enemy force;
- (5) perform flanking or enveloping maneuvers in conjunction with divisional breakthrough operations;
- (6) block movement of enemy reserves toward a breakthrough area;
- (7) perform distant and close reconnaissance in force;
- (8) occupy and temporarily defend a portion of the division's defensive sector;
- (9) occupy or block gaps in the defense created by enemy nuclear strikes;
- (10) operate as a mobile counterattack force.²³

In actuality, most of the missions so defined were those of a forward detachment operating separately from the division's tank regiment.

Western analyses also identified an independent role for a motorized rifle regiment, stating:

The regiment is capable of performing independent operations as a regimental combat team. When a specific mission can be accomplished by a portion of that division, or when centralized control of the various divisional elements is impracticable, the division commander may employ a regiment independently. For example, the regiment may be employed as a forward detachment. Before being committed on any independent mission, the regiment is normally allocated additional armor, artillery, chemical, and engineer support from division.²⁴

Later, when describing the function of the motorized regiment's tank battalion, it added, "The tank battalion may be reinforced by motorized rifle units and employed as the regiment's major offensive

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

element to seize the regimental objective or in the pursuit as an armored task force.”²⁵

All these assessments accurately portrayed the role, function, and missions of forward detachments as the Soviets described them. The only confusion resulted from an inability to define which force would perform the actual function.

Soviet tactical maneuver concepts throughout the 1950s remained closely modeled after wartime practices. Throughout several force reorganizations, the Soviets retained their faith in the utility of tactical maneuver as a primary prerequisite for achieving offensive success. This Soviet faith in maneuver endured but in markedly differing circumstances after 1960.

THE REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS: 1961–1970

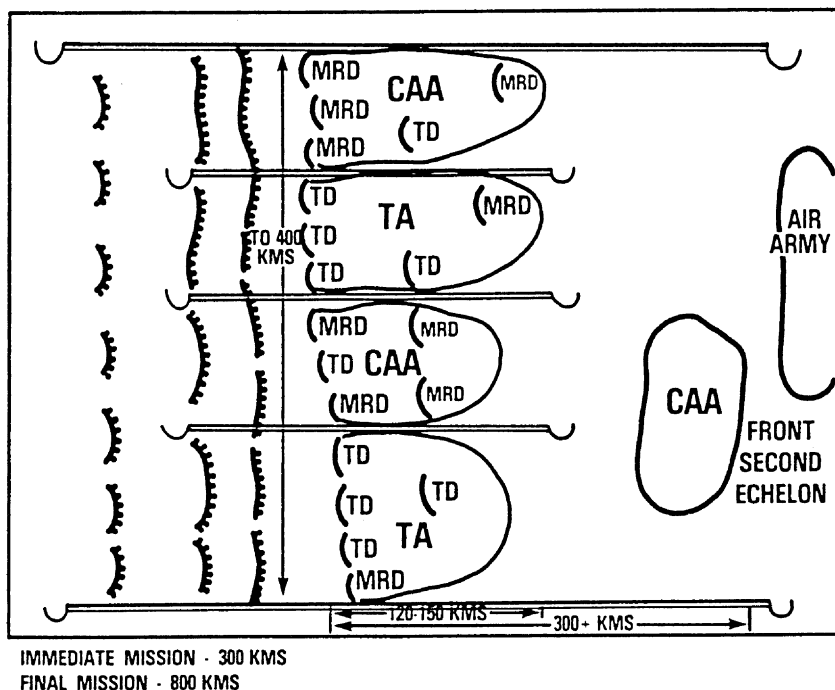
A major shift in Soviet military doctrine occurred after 1960, signaled by Premier N. S. Khrushchev's declaration that a revolution had taken place in military affairs. Marshal V. D. Sokolovsky's 1962 work *Voennaia Strategiia* [Military Strategy] summed up the change, “On the battlefield the decisive role will be played by the fire of nuclear weapons; the other means of armed conflict will utilize the nuclear attack for the final defeat of the enemy.”²⁶ Soviet acceptance of the notion that future war would inevitably be nuclear had a serious effect on traditional Soviet views regarding operations and the Soviet Army force structure. Strategic matters, and the newly created Strategic Rocket Forces, eclipsed the realm of operational art and the role of ground forces in conducting tactical maneuver since rocket-nuclear forces were the main means of destroying operational large units of all types of armed forces.²⁷

After 1961, the Soviet force structure was tailored to suit its new role in this “single option” of nuclear war. Tank armies, combined arms armies, and motorized rifle divisions were lightened in manpower and weaponry; and tank armies and tank divisions became more tank-pure on the assumption they could best survive on the nuclear battlefield.²⁸ The new ground force role was designed simply to clear up the carnage after a nuclear exchange.

In wartime, Soviet *fronts* and armies deployed in extended fashion across larger frontages and in greater depth (Figures 65–66). Armor forces operated in first echelon because of their greater chances of maneuvering and surviving and advanced along numerous axes to exploit gaps created by nuclear fire. In such a scheme, operational maneuver was irrelevant, for nuclear fires inflicted most destruction

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

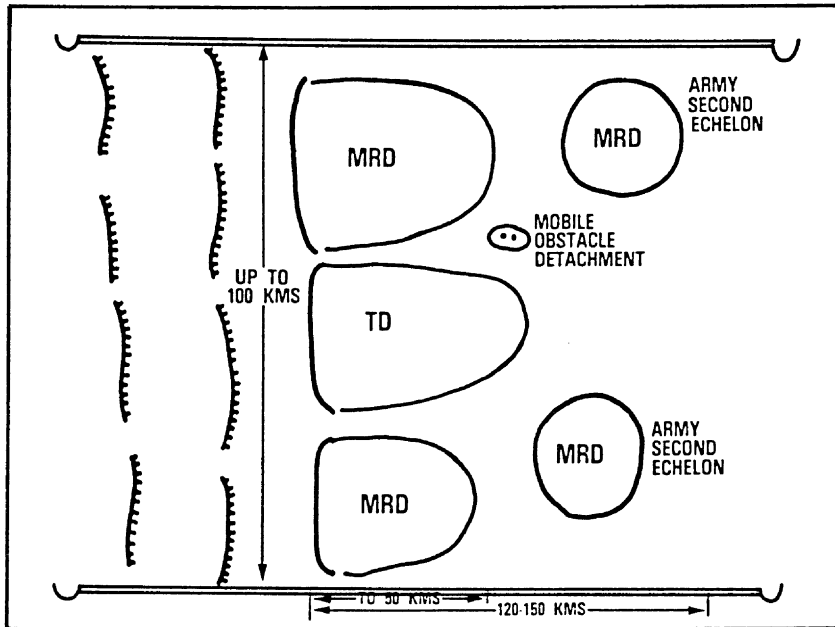
on the enemy. While no portion of the forces conducted distinct operational maneuver, tactical maneuver took on a new meaning and tactical maneuver forces new importance.



65. Front operational formation, 1968

On this nuclear and increasingly fragmented battlefield, combined arms divisions, regiments, and battalions exploited nuclear strikes, completed the destruction of enemy forces, and occupied important regions. These mobile formations attacked in dispersed combat formation along numerous separate axes in operations coordinated as to timing and direction. Concentration for the initial attack involved massive fire and last minute movements under tight security. Attacks occurred from assembly areas in the depth rather than from jumping-off positions near the front. Most forces attacked in pre-combat formation at high tempo and deployed only when necessary. Whenever possible, tank forces or motorized rifle units reinforced by tanks made up the first echelon. The attack was led by tank-heavy forward detachments which exploited nuclear fires.

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985



IMMEDIATE MISSION · UP TO 100 KMS
 SUBSEQUENT MISSION · UP TO 300 KMS

66. Army operational formation, 1968

In this offensive environment, forward detachments increased in both number and importance. A stream of Soviet military writings affirmed the utility of forward detachments and articulated new roles. Colonel I. Vorob'ev, writing in the General Staff journal, *Voennaia Mysl'* [Military Thought] in 1965 best described the forward detachment's role. He reviewed the traditional missions of forward detachments and concluded they had expanded:

There is every reason to assume that under conditions of the ever-growing maneuverability and dynamics of combat operations, there will be an increase in the tactical and operational significance as well as in the ratio of operations by forward detachments. This is inevitable because, in modern battles and operations, the forward detachments will have to perform missions of seizing and holding important objectives and securing information on the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

formation and strength of enemy forces, by operating more decisively, at greater depth than before, and in a very complex situation.²⁹

After ascribing operational significance to forward detachments, Vorob'ev listed the missions they were suited to perform:

- ensuring a more rapid advance and complete exploitation of nuclear strikes delivered by advancing forces,
- destroying enemy nuclear systems,
- destroying individual, small enemy reserve groups and command and control and communications centers,
- destroying individual enemy PVO [air defense] groups,
- creating by maneuver favorable nuclear targets (enemy groups, etc.),
- conducting raiding operations against multiple objectives.³⁰

So important and numerous were the tasks of forward detachments that Vorob'ev argued for adopting the term “operational forward detachment” and creating detachments of variable size to serve each level of command rather than the usual reinforced battalion-size detachment. Because of modern equipment, “practically any combat-ready motorized rifle or tank formation [division], unit [regiment], or subunit [battalion] may always be employed as a forward detachment without special training.”³¹ The type of detachment would, of course, be decided by the mission assigned to it.

To counter arguments that, since forward detachments were as mobile as other forces, there was no distinction between them and, hence, no need for such detachments, Vorob'ev cited wartime mobile group use of forward detachments. Then, as now, the detachments took on a special quality by virtue of the mission assigned them, their part in the operational plan, their tailored configuration, and by virtue of the detachments' flexible manner of operations.

Vorob'ev stressed the fact that forward detachments could now lead the attack, even prior to the advance of the first echelons, in a pre-emptive role (as in Manchuria). In fact, he argued they had become “a permanent element in the combat formation of advancing groupings.”³² Because of the high tempo of contemporary operations, in order to maintain operational continuity, forward detachments had to be rotated with new detachments replacing the old ones. Vorob'ev went on to emphasize the utility of forward detachments in the meeting engagement and in crossing traditional obstacles and contaminated

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

zones but pointed out the necessity for close cooperation between the forward detachment and air and air defense forces and for creation of mobile airborne communications systems for use by forward detachments.

Vorob'ev's article was a statement of what existed and an appeal to continue development of imaginative ways to use forward detachments. As he wrote, others continued intense efforts to document old functions and suggest new ones for the complex environment of nuclear war. Major General A. Zhilin investigated contemporary influences on meeting engagements and concluded:

In favorable circumstances, especially on the axis of nuclear strikes, where the enemy has been reliably suppressed, tank units, in some cases at the very beginning of battle, can successfully advance in pre-combat formation and even in march formation under cover of strong forward detachments, deploying in combat formations only when meeting with enemy forces. In our view, the new characteristic feature of meeting battle is related to the urge to exploit as rapidly as possible the results of nuclear strikes.³³

For this reason, tank forces in general, and forward detachments in particular, were suited to conduct meeting engagements.

Forward detachments also played a role in penetration operations. Thus:

When tactical nuclear weapons appeared, modes of employment of tank subunits [battalions] and units [regiments] in penetrating an enemy defense experienced substantial changes. Now, when a defense could be successfully neutralized simultaneously to its entire depth, tank units and subunits, pursuant to the new manuals, were to be employed in the first echelon of the advancing troops, in order to exploit more effectively and promptly the results of nuclear strikes.³⁴

Consequently:

Tank units and subunits began frequently to be designated to operate as forward detachments during penetration (breaching) of the defense. They would be assigned missions to capture important positions, installations, and areas with the enemy's tactical zone of defense.³⁵

Regarding the tempo of operations, Major General V. Reznichenko wrote, "In all conditions, wider use of tactical air assaults and for-

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

ward detachments has important meaning for deciding problems of increasing the tempo of the offensive."³⁶ Air assaults offered a further means for bypassing contaminated areas which slowed the advance of ground units. Lieutenant Colonel L. Korzun emphasized the utility of forward detachments on the pursuit, first recalling their wartime role:

As is well known, forward detachments were very widely used during pursuit in offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War. Especially widespread were tactical forward detachments sent out by corps and divisions. Besides them, in some cases, forward detachments were sent out from operational formations, especially combined arms armies, and sometimes from tank armies. ... Operations of forward detachments often contributed not only to tactical but also operational success.³⁷

Korzun then turned to the present, arguing:

In contemporary pursuit, the role of forward detachments, in our view, is still growing. Their successful use permits one to rapidly exploit the results of nuclear strikes, to destroy rear guards and cut enemy withdrawal routes, to seize important regions and objectives, while at the same time protecting the successful overcoming by main forces of attacking formations and operational large units, of defensive positions, water obstacles, while assisting the splitting up of withdrawing enemy units and their destruction in detail.³⁸

By seizing key objectives, forward detachments could also create favorable targets for friendly nuclear strikes. In addition, forward detachments could seize enemy rocket positions and aerodromes to help pre-empt enemy nuclear attack.

General P. Kurochkin, in an important article reviewing the operations of tank armies in wartime and assessing the applicability of those operations to the 1960s, concluded:

There is no doubt that the role and importance of forward detachments now will not only persist, but become still greater, with these being called on to execute missions taking advantage of the results of nuclear strikes, in cooperation with air assault troops, making possible the swift advance of their own forces.³⁹

Colonel V. Fedorenko wrote a similar article on tank and mechanized corps experiences, highlighting their offensive use and pointing out the positive role played by forward detachments in their operations.⁴⁰

Aside from the flood of 1960s articles on mobile warfare and the

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

conduct of tactical maneuver, a number of textbooks on military art, tactics, and small units operations gave shape and form to contemporary forward detachment operations. A book on battalion tactics surveyed the role of forward detachments on the march, in the offensive, during a meeting engagement, and in the pursuit. Regarding a march in anticipation of a meeting engagement, "The battalion may operate as a forward detachment, in the advance guard (flank detachment), or move as part of the main body of the unit [regiment], at the head or tail of the column."⁴¹ In a meeting engagement, the detachment had the mission of forestalling the enemy by seizing key positions and holding them for the arrival of the main force and for conducting reconnaissance for the command which sent it out. When serving as a forward detachment, "A motorized rifle battalion may be reinforced with a tank company; an antitank artillery battery; up to a battalion of artillery; antiaircraft, mortar, and sapper subunits; and a radiation and chemical reconnaissance squad."⁴²

In the course of an attack, the motorized rifle battalion "may be designated as the forward detachment to seize a suitable position from the march for the purpose of denying the enemy the opportunity to organize a defense on it with withdrawing subunits or with approaching reserves."⁴³ It could be designated as a forward detachment initially or during the course of an attack. While in the pursuit, as in the attack, a forward detachment engaged in decisive combat to thwart enemy plans and facilitate the continuation of the main force offensive. The book went on to detail the battalion's role and method of operations as a forward detachment in each of these circumstances.

Similar detailed works on the nature of maneuver in combat and on the conduct of the march and meeting engagements reiterated in detail the contemporary role and importance of forward detachments. A 1969 work expanded on an important theme already mentioned in earlier works; specifically, the cooperative efforts of forward detachments and air assault units on the nuclear battlefield. Air assault forces could be employed during the penetration phase of an operation to exploit the effects of nuclear strikes by seizing key objectives deep in the enemy defenses. In addition:

During the pursuit of a withdrawing enemy, the mission of the tactical air assault includes the disruption of the planned withdrawal of enemy forces, and, in cooperation with its own forces, their encirclement. Operating in front of forces pursuing from the front, air assaults, while cooperating with forward detachments advancing along parallel routes, can seize road junctions,

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

separate sectors of intermediate or rear defensive positions, and also carry out raids on separate enemy withdrawing columns.⁴⁴

Included in this mission were joint operations by air assault forces and forward detachments to conduct river crossings.

The most comprehensive general portrayal of the contemporary role and function of the forward detachment was contained in V. G. Reznichenko's 1966 work *Taktika* [Tactics]. Reznichenko recognized the entire range of forward detachment missions which he described within the nuclear context. On the march in anticipation of a meeting engagement, the tactical force employed a reconnaissance element, a forward detachment, organs of march security, the main force, and rear service units and subunits. The forward detachment "is sent out to forestall the enemy from securing favorable positions and to hold them for the approach of the main force. It is also responsible for conducting reconnaissance in the interests of the commander who sent it out."⁴⁵

When a meeting engagement developed, "the forward detachment, moving at maximum possible speed to its assigned objectives, destroys small groups which it meets on its path by decisive action and, from the march, seizes designated objectives and holds them until the arrival of the main force."⁴⁶ If the enemy secured the objective, the forward detachment attacked his flanks and rear from the march, secured the objective, and held it until the main force arrived. If confronted by a superior enemy, the detachment defended along favorable positions until the main forces joined the attack.

Reznichenko recognized the wartime role of the forward detachment in the combat formation of attacking units and the fact that its importance rested primarily in its superior mobility and firepower. He argued that full echeloning still had utility, although often a single echelon was more appropriate. The principal function of the forward detachment on the offense, however, occurred in the depths of the enemy defense.

During battle in the depth of the defense, motorized rifle and tank subunits [battalions] cooperate with subunits operating on their axes as forward detachments and tactical air assaults. Tactical air assaults and forward detachments, while seizing road junctions, crossings, and bridges, assist the successful movement of attacking forces. As they approach the air assault force and forward detachment, attacking subunits support their operations with long-range artillery fire and then by joint attacks from various directions to destroy the most important enemy objectives.⁴⁷

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

Regarding pursuit, Reznichenko noted that, unlike the past, conditions for pursuit could now arise “at the very beginning of offensive battle.”⁴⁸ Therefore, forward detachments and tactical air assaults played an “important role in securing decisive and swift pursuit.”⁴⁹ Forward detachments performed their usual function of securing key objectives in the enemy defensive, and air assault forces added depth to those attacks. In particular, the two forces jointly could attack enemy nuclear delivery means, antiaircraft systems, and command and control centers. As before, both forces also secured river crossing sites and bridgeheads.

Reznichenko also surfaced a defensive mission for the forward detachment, stating:

In the presence of a security zone, forward detachments, artfully maneuvering fires and subunits and employing obstacles and rubble, can halt the enemy in a region where one intends to destroy him with nuclear weapons, can block his deployment and attack in favorable positions, as well as determine the direction of his main attack.⁵⁰

Western assessment kept track of Soviet interest in the combat use of forward detachments. A 1961 study of motorized rifle division tactics noted that a medium tank regiment could function as a forward detachment, stating:

A forward detachment (*peredovoi otryad*) is a task-force type of unit that may be formed by the division to seize a critical objective in the zone of advance of the division. It is not considered part of the advance guard and does not receive allocations of units and arms from the advance guard. If a forward detachment is utilized, the strength and composition of the advance guard may be reduced from regimental to battalion size.⁵¹

The assessment recognized that the forward detachment performed a distinct mission which was normally “to seize a tactically important objective and hold it until the arrival of the main forces,” and that its composition varied with its mission.⁵²

On the march in anticipation of a meeting engagement, the forward detachment typically “consists of a motorized rifle battalion reinforced with one or two tank companies, a battery of antitank artillery, an antiaircraft artillery battery, a sapper platoon, and a chemical reconnaissance team ... accompanied by a forward artillery reconnaissance and observation party and by air-ground liaison personnel.”⁵³ Although this assessment missed the Soviet propensity for employing

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

armor-heavy subunits as forward detachments, it went on to define accurately the manner in which the detachment operated.

The assessment properly described the role played by the forward detachments in a hasty penetration operation, emphasizing, "the division employs strong reconnaissance elements, march security forces, and forward detachments in efforts to over-run enemy security elements and to probe for weaknesses in the enemy defensive system."⁵⁴ Likewise, on the pursuit, "regiments normally employ their forces for pursuit of enemy columns within their assigned zones of advance and may organize tank-heavy task-force-type units as forward detachments or parallel pursuit detachments to disrupt enemy columns and cut routes of withdrawal."⁵⁵ The tank regiment provided tank support for the forward detachments. This assessment was one of the few to recognize Soviet use of forward detachments at regimental level.

The assessment also recognized the forward detachment's defensive mission, stating, "Division security and reconnaissance elements include forward detachments and reconnaissance groups and patrols formed from second-echelon units and organic reconnaissance units."⁵⁶ The defense's security zone (outpost line) consisted of strong points and intensive obstacles.

The strong points are occupied by forward detachments from a reinforced motorized rifle company to a battalion in size. The forward detachments employ company and platoon-size strong points to cover main roads and probable avenues of approach to conduct a delaying action. They are supported by artillery fire from temporary positions in front of the main defense belt and by artillery located within the main battle position.⁵⁷

As the attack unfolded, "the forward detachments defend in a hold-it-at-all-cost manner, deny enemy observation of the FEBA, launch limited counterattacks, and attempt to deceive the enemy into deploying for the attack well forward of the FEBA."⁵⁸

A 1968 Western assessment of the motorized rifle division repeated, almost verbatim, the 1961 description of offensive combat in general and forward detachment operations in particular.⁵⁹

Soviet fixation on the single nuclear option and all its ramifications soon began to waver. As early as 1964, major studies began appearing that focused on the operational level of war in a conventional context. By implication, this reflected Soviet doubts over their 1960 stance. After 1966, most Soviet writers still focused on the nuclear context of operations but began adding the qualification, "However, we do not rule out the possibility of warfare using only conventional means."⁶⁰

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

In time, the material following the “however” (the conventional) attracted more attention than what preceded the “however” (the nuclear). Clearly a new stage was emerging in Soviet military doctrine.

However, the role of forward detachments did not diminish in this new period. The expanded role accorded to the forward detachment by the existing nuclear weaponry and the new missions which it was required to perform did not wither. In fact, the forward detachment increased in importance as the Soviets pondered combat in an increasingly conventional environment.

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS: 1971–1985

Simultaneously with Khrushchev’s removal from power in 1964, evidence began appearing which reflected the Soviet military’s discomfort with recent doctrinal trends. Although probably not altogether happy with the reduced stature of the ground forces, military theorists had temporarily accepted the revolution in military affairs as long as the United States retained clear nuclear superiority. As that superiority began to wane, however, and the U.S. shifted from the strategy of massive retaliation to flexible response, the conventional option became, at first, a faint hope.

The transformation in Soviet military thought to a renewed belief that war could be kept conventional took many years to fully mature. It first required the Soviets to checkmate U.S. nuclear capabilities at each level (strategic, theater, and tactical) and then, as the world wearied of the specter of nuclear war, political conditions for a reduction of these arms could occur, followed perhaps by their partial or full abolition. This would cast the specter of warfare back into the conventional realm where the Soviets were far more capable and, hence, more comfortable. This blueprint would take many years, if not decades, to implement. In the meantime, the Soviet military sought to fashion strategic, operational, and tactical combat techniques which would make any opponent’s decision to use nuclear weapons even more difficult.

This movement toward a conventional option was paralleled by renewed Soviet concern for the operational level of war in general, and operational art in particular, which, in its turn, was reflected at first by a trickle, and then by a flood of writings on the subject. The literary offensive began with publication of General P. Kurochkin’s study *The Operations of Tank Armies* (1964) and *Questions of Strategy and Operational Art 1917–1940* (1965) with a preface by Chief of the General Staff Marshal M. V. Zakharov which resurrected the memory

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

and writings of many of the purged theorists of the 1920s and 1930s as well as their concepts of deep battle and deep operations.⁶¹

Throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s the steady trickle of articles on operational and tactical maneuver in an increasingly conventional environment ultimately became a flood. These were accompanied by detailed studies of operational experiences where operational maneuver had played a critical role. By 1980 the concept of using operational maneuver groups, contemporary versions of the former mobile groups, was fully developed, although the Soviets did not apply a specific name to the new mobile groups. Terminology in F. Sverdlov's book, *Maneuver in Land Warfare*, referring to "maneuver by operational groups" finally received clearer definition in several Polish articles which spoke directly about operational maneuver groups [OGM in Polish].⁶² Regardless of the formal name applied to operational maneuver forces, definition of their function was complete; and specific work on their contemporary role was well underway by the end of the 1970s and would be further refined in the future. The hiatus in operational maneuver caused by the revolution in military affairs was clearly over.

Soviet ground force strength and the composition of the force structure reflected this trend. Within the expanding ground forces, formations and units have grown in size and improved in that combined arms balance so necessary to conduct conventional operations. Tank armies and divisions have received new complements of mechanized infantry; all divisions have increased in manpower, tank, and artillery strength, and in mobility; and the logistical structure has been streamlined to better support sustained deep conventional operations.⁶³

A wide variety of supporting functional units have evolved to fulfill the dreams of those who created the concept of deep operational maneuver in the 1930s. Air assault brigades provide a new vertical dimension to both operational and tactical maneuver and may be supplemented in the future by even larger, more capable divisional-size air assault corps. Diversionary brigades add a new dimension to deep operations by further threatening the viability of potential enemies' rear areas. They represent an attempt to replicate the extensive partisan and diversionary operations of the Second World War, which by 1944 materially assisted operations by operational maneuver forces. Creation of assault helicopter formations as flying artillery or tanks assist more traditional aviation units in providing necessary air protection for deep operating forces.

Along with these structural changes, the Soviets have experimented with new types of forces modeled closely, in their combined arms mix,

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

after the former mobile groups. Re-publication in 1985 of General P. A. Rotmistrov's 1946 speech to GOFG signals the Soviet belief that they face a force structuring problem similar to that faced in 1946 – namely to create a balanced combined arms force to replace the former armor-heavy force, one which can cope with warfare in an age of high technology weaponry, on an urbanized and forested battlefield in central Europe, as well as in other varied regions of the world. Re-publication of Rotmistrov's speech, in all likelihood, signifies that the process is well underway, if not nearly complete. This restructuring is likely to reach down to regimental and battalion level as the Soviets provide these units and subunits with a combined arms mix more suited to their increasingly independent role in operations.

Soviet concern for tactical maneuver has both paralleled and reflected their renewed concern for operational maneuver. Since the early 1970s, the Soviets have tasked forward detachments with performing a wide array of traditional conventional missions while adding those suited to a potentially nuclear environment. As Colonel V. Savkin wrote in 1974:

The conduct of combat operations by subunits without the use of nuclear weapons demands concentration of large quantities of conventional means of destruction on main axes and is characterized by successive defeats of the enemy. In such conditions, units and subunits must constantly be ready for operations with the use of nuclear weapons.⁶⁴

Soviet descriptions of forward detachment missions have remained relatively constant since 1971. The frequency of articles and studies on forward detachment operations, both historical and contemporary, have markedly increased; and the recommended composition of the forward detachments has subtly changed as the Soviets have shifted from the 1960 reliance on tank-heavy forces to a better combined arms balance.

During the 1970s, while most Soviet theorists publicly maintained the nuclear context for operations, especially in their major published works, the amount of space devoted to conventional "type" operations expanded. Articles on distinctly tactical themes often discarded that nuclear context entirely. The two books most oft-quoted in the West set the trend in motion. A. A. Sidorenko's 1970 work *Nastuplenie* [The offensive] described operations within a nuclear context but, in doing so, covered techniques equally applicable to a high intensity conventional environment. Sidorenko articulated forward detachment missions already sketched out in the 1960s.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

V. E. Savkin's 1972 study *Osnovnye printsipy operativnogo iskusstva i takiki* [The Basic principles of operational art and tactics] legitimized the realm of operational art after its neglect in the 1960s. Using intensive study of Great Patriotic War operational and tactical techniques, Savkin focused new attention on conventional matters, although carefully maintaining the nuclear context. Savkin clearly described forward detachment missions, past and present, and noted, "New means of warfare and a qualitatively different nature of troops create more favorable conditions for wide use of such *podrazdeleniia* [subunits] and substantially increase their combat capabilities."⁶⁵ Prophetically, Savkin noted the feature which, in the future, would become the distinguishing factor between designated operational and tactical maneuver forces and main force units, given that all were mobile. He wrote, "The difference in composition of troops operating on the axes of the main attack and on other axes probably will be less sharply expressed than was formerly the case. The main troop grouping will be distinguished more in the *qualitative* sense than in numbers" [emphasis added].⁶⁶

In April 1972 Savkin published an article on maneuver in the journal *Voennyi Vestnik* [Military Herald] which precipitated responses from others later in the year. This series of articles reviewed all aspects of maneuver in contemporary war. After mandatory reference to nuclear war, a group of distinguished theorists including Sverdlov and Reznichenko surveyed maneuver in a distinctly conventional manner. During the exchange a new term emerged – *protivoiadernyi manevr* [antinuclear maneuver] – which Sverdlov defined as "the organized shifting of subunits with the aim of withdrawing them out from under the possible blows of enemy nuclear means, to protect their survival and subsequent freedom of action to strike a blow on the enemy. Therefore, antinuclear maneuver is also one of the forms of maneuver."⁶⁷ The defensive aspect of this maneuver was complemented by offensive measures "to rapidly disperse subunits or change the direction of their offensive ... and conduct other measures related to defense against weapons of mass destruction."⁶⁸

Antinuclear maneuver also had other facets which would become apparent as the decade progressed. In fact, operational and tactical maneuver techniques themselves, as they emerged over the decade, were specifically designed as types of antinuclear maneuver. A force which employed them skillfully could seriously inhibit an enemy's ability to employ nuclear weapons, even if it wished to, an intention the Soviets already seriously questioned. Thus, by 1987 Reznichenko was able to write on this important theme:

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

The continuous conduct of battle results from the growing combat capabilities of forces, the nature of contemporary operations which develop in great depth and the demands of operational art as expressed in tactics. Continuous operations guarantee the achievement of objectives in a short time with less expenditure of forces and weapons; deprive the enemy of the time and capability for re-establishing the combat worthiness of his force, for carrying out the maneuver of reserves, for regrouping and striking blows, for supply of material means, and for organizing opposition on new positions; and assist in the destruction of the enemy in detail.

The continuous conduct of battle at a high tempo creates unfavorable conditions for enemy use of weapons of massive destruction. He cannot exactly determine targets for nuclear strikes and, besides, will be forced to shift his nuclear delivery means often.⁶⁹

This restatement of antinuclear maneuver captured the essence and overall rationale of Soviet operational and tactical maneuver concepts and techniques in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In 1973 the Soviets published a major study of troop control during the Great Patriotic War which analyzed control and coordination of large forces at the operational and tactical levels of combat, in particular focusing on detailed aspects of troop control during high speed operations of mobile groups and forward detachments.⁷⁰

In a 1974 article, Colonel V. Savkin again reviewed facets of contemporary maneuver. After two paragraphs on nuclear warfare, throughout the remainder of the article, Savkin clearly distinguished between nuclear and conventional warfare but noted that the destructiveness of advanced conventional weaponry required resort to many of the maneuver techniques required by nuclear war itself.

While analyzing the nature of contemporary war, it is necessary to remember that science and technology are developing at a stormy pace; and, in all armies, new and new types of weapons are appearing. This demands a creative approach to the study of its [battle's] theory and to mastery of the artful adaptation of theoretical precepts into reality.⁷¹

In 1977 there appeared the first of two major studies on armored warfare which would appear in the decade, General A. I. Radzievsky's *Tankovi udar* [Tank strike]. This classic detailed study of tank army operations during the Great Patriotic War exhaustively examined all aspects of operational and tactical maneuver during the war. Two years

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

later Marshal O. A. Losik published an even more detailed work on the same subject. Both works covered in detail the traditional operations of forward detachments in a wide range of operations. In his preface and conclusion, Radzievsky noted:

Contemporary offensive operations will also be characterized by decisive aims, large scale, maneuverability, and dynamic combat operations. Indeed, therefore, the study of experience of the combat use of tank armies in the Great Patriotic War today has important meaning ... in particular, the experience of using tank armies to achieve the decisive aims of an operation in a short period.⁷²

Losik, as commandant of the Malinovsky Tank Academy, appropriately noted:

History teaches that the more the military cadre works out in peacetime on the basis of new concepts of military art, and the more detailed and carefully they examine theory by experience and operational training and especially by real combat experience, the closer that theory relates to actuality and to new demands.⁷³

As Radzievsky and Losik prepared and published their major works, a steady stream of articles on operational and tactical maneuver appeared in a wide range of Soviet military journals, responding to Losik's counsel and, more important, indicating the path of developing Soviet military art. In the center of that path lay concepts for operational and tactical maneuver which Soviet theorists obviously viewed as answering the military problem of escaping from the stranglehold of nuclear war.

In 1977 the journal *Voennyi Vestnik* published a new series of articles on the theme of maneuver as it related to high tempo operations. The authors concluded that only constant maneuvering could produce high tempos and success in a nuclear environment and added, "One must not, however, rely only on nuclear weapons."⁷⁴ The authors singled out forward detachments as a key maneuver element, stating:

An important role in the achievement of a high offensive tempo can be played by forward detachments, prepared and aimed at specific objectives, whose composition expediently includes tank and motorized rifle subunits on BMPs with reinforcements. By their daring and enterprising operations and skillful envelopment of strong points, they can rapidly fulfill the mission.⁷⁵

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

Forward detachments operated in conjunction with tactical air assaults which secured command posts, launch and firing positions, and assisted the continuous advance of the main force. Combat helicopters, in close communications with other forces, provided a new means of air support.

As if to emphasize the growing dual nature of combat, a 1977 article on post-war tactics of the Soviet Army categorically stated, “There appeared [from the beginning of the 1960s – according to the author, the most recent period] views on the conduct of offensive battle not only with the use of nuclear weapons but also with conventional means of destruction.”⁷⁶ Later in the same article, he again stated, “Consequently, in the 1960s, the tactics of offensive battle were worked out both with the use of nuclear weapons, and with the use of only conventional means of destruction.” In both instances offensive battle required “non-stop penetration of prepared enemy defenses at high tempo.”⁷⁷

By the end of the 1970s, Soviet views on tactical air assaults had matured to a point where the air assault force itself could send out a forward detachment or function as a forward detachment in its own right. A 1980 assessment noted:

If, in the war years or in the first post-war years, it was considered that an air assault could occupy a defense and firmly hold strong points (positions), not taking into consideration losses, until the arrival of the main force, then subsequently, with an increase in the maneuver capabilities of subunits, it became more active. An assault, while dispatching forward detachments on enemy approach routes, used reserves and second echelon subunits to conduct counterattacks. ...

The detachments usually consist of from a company to a battalion, reinforced by artillery and sapper subunits. They carry out from ambush strikes on enemy columns, his artillery and his nuclear means; hold up his movement, and destroy his command and control while organizing attacks on his staffs and communications routes. Detachments widely employ mines, construct obstacles on roads, and destroy road construction.⁷⁸

In 1987 another article confirmed the independent role of an air assault force, stating:

A parachute-air assault battalion during operations in the enemy rear can serve as a forward detachment with the missions to seize, on the axis of a raid, an important objective or favorable position

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

(mountain pass, crossing over a river obstacle, road junction, defile, etc.) and to protect the approach of the main force. Its composition can include artillery and engineer-sapper subunits.⁷⁹

By the early 1980s, Soviet works had clearly defined the expanded role of forward detachments in both offensive and defensive operations. The definition continued to expand. F. D. Sverdlov's 1982 work *Takticheskii manevr* [Tactical maneuver] reviewed the basic nature of maneuver warfare and sketched out, using historical examples, the role of forward detachments during penetration, exploitation, pursuit, river crossings, and meeting engagements.⁸⁰

An important article written in 1982 by N. Kireev reviewed post-war tactics and articulated contemporary missions of forward detachments in penetration operations. He prefaced his description with the remarks:

Since the beginning of the 1960s, our military theory and practice have allowed for the conduct of combat operations with conventional weapons only, but with the constant threat of enemy employment of nuclear weapons. This circumstance dictated the necessity of determining modes of employment of tank units and subunits in penetrating a well-prepared enemy defense in conformity with the new demands.⁸¹

He then described the contemporary role of forward detachments:

In connection with an increase in the role of the security area in the enemy's defense as well as the presence of a large number of diversified minefields and obstacles in the defense, tank subunits were sometimes designated to be employed as special forward detachments. In this case their principal mission was to capture and destroy weapons and control facilities for barriers of fire established in this zone, and aggressively penetrate and capture tactically important installations and positions, with the objective of creating the requisite conditions for the main forces to advance to the forward edge of the enemy's main defensive area and to penetrate it.⁸²

Defensive lines deep in the enemy's defense were to be overrun without a halt, in dispersed approach march formation, and sometimes in march columns as well. Penetration was to be accomplished primarily by advance guards or forward detachments as in a usual offensive operation.

Kireev accompanied his contemporary analysis of forward detach-

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

ment operations with a comprehensive examination of wartime tank and mechanized corps' forward detachment operations. He finished his analysis by concluding, "These rich combat experiences have great importance both for working out the theory of the use of tank units [regiments] in the offensive in contemporary conditions, and for the practical construction of forces during the course of combat and political training."⁸³

The second edition of V. G. Reznichenko's study, *Taktika*, published in 1984, underscored the importance of maneuverability in contemporary war and the role of the forward detachments in achieving maneuverability:

The most important means of achieving high maneuverability are: reliable neutralization of the entire depth of the enemy combat formation by nuclear weapons and conventional means and timely and effective exploitation of their effects; wide use of aviation, tactical air assaults and forward detachments; decisive offensive action in pre-combat formation and columns without dismounting; the conduct of maneuver operations along axes; decisive overcoming of radioactive contaminated sectors, obstructions, destroyed regions, fires, etc.; the forcing of water obstacles from the march and other missions.⁸⁴

In his 1987 edition of *Taktika*, Reznichenko provided a more refined description of the contemporary battlefield and the role of tactics on it.

While examining the course of the development of offensive tactics, one must note that today, when combat operations embrace simultaneously the entire depth of the combat formation of both contending sides, the necessity arises for a positive reassessment of the contents of combat missions of forces on the offensive. In particular, it seems expedient to determine them not by line, as it was done before, but rather by important area (objective), the seizure of which will secure the undermining of the tactical stability of the enemy defense.⁸⁵

This description captured the contemporary milieu in which the forward detachment had come to function and one of the principal missions assigned to the forward detachment. Reznichenko focused on the utility of using new combat techniques to surprise an enemy, among which he included "daring raiding operations" which he defined as "the delivery of surprise and decisive tank strikes on enemy strong points and during the development of the offensive in the depths of the defense."⁸⁶ In his 1987 edition of *Taktika* Reznichenko expanded this theme, writing:

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

In contemporary conditions, broadened possibilities are created for further enrichment of the arsenal of the tactics of offensive battles by new tactical methods. Thus, in connection with the fragmented nature of contemporary battle ... there are possibilities for further development of raiding operations tactics.⁸⁷

Reznichenko pointed out that both mobile groups and forward detachments had carried out raids during the Great Patriotic War and concluded, "Now raiding operations can be employed from the very beginning of the offensive" to destroy enemy nuclear delivery means, enemy high precision weapons complexes, air defense and radio-electronic combat communications centers, and for seizure of communications centers.⁸⁸ The decisiveness and dynamism of contemporary offensive combat created a broad range of opportunities for using forward detachments.

Besides securing separate terrain objectives (road junctions, population points, passes, etc.), forward detachments can perform such complex missions as destroying nuclear delivery means, air defense means, enemy command and control centers, some of his rear area objectives, and combat with air (amphibious) assaults and airmobile subunits. When assigned combat missions, forward detachments are normally given: composition and direction of operations, objectives and when to secure them, and the order of artillery and air support of its actions.⁸⁹

The 1987 edition added chemical delivery means and reconnaissance fire complexes to the list of forward detachment objectives.

Reznichenko pointed out the decisive role played by forward detachments during the Great Patriotic War and their ability to overcome natural obstacles from the march, in particular rivers, and strongly suggested an expanded role for forward detachments in contemporary combat. Subunits, pursuing the enemy from the front, "destroy security subunits by decisive operations; penetrate to the main force; and, in coordination with neighboring subunits as well as with tactical air assaults and forward detachments (advance guards), if they are created, attack the enemy from the march."⁹⁰ Both forward detachments and advance guards also played "an important part" in river crossings.

Reznichenko declared the principal mission of the forward detachment in the meeting engagement was "while traveling at maximum speed, to attempt to secure its designated objective before the enemy did."⁹¹ It destroyed small enemy groups in its path, inflicted maximum

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

casualties on the enemy, and facilitated the advance of the main force. Failing in its mission, it maneuvered, along with its main force, to overcome enemy defenses. Reznichenko's 1987 edition expanded the description of the meeting engagement and added the forward detachment mission of containing enemy forces so that they could be engaged by concentrated fire. The new edition was also more specific regarding the tactical missions of forward detachments, advance guards, and main force battalions. The forward detachment's immediate mission was "the seizure and holding of assigned favorable positions, the delivery of fire from all weapons on the advance enemy subunits and protection of the movement and deployment of the main force."⁹² Reznichenko noted the addition of tactical air assaults to the formal combat formation and "wider use of forward detachments."⁹³

Reznichenko's 1987 edition added further details to forward detachment operations. He noted the importance of providing extensive artillery support to them and stated they could be formed on the march in anticipation of battle or during the attack itself; and, when performing their missions, they could advance 30–60 kilometers in advance of the main force.⁹⁴ Reznichenko specifically mentioned joint operations by forward detachments and air assault forces against particular objectives. He then added considerable detail on forward detachment operations during a meeting engagement analogous to that contained in Sverdlov's extensive work. In general, the expanded passages reiterated the importance the Soviets attached to the meeting engagement and the role played by forward detachments in that type of combat. It also recognized the dangers posed by enemy "precision weapons systems" and suggested remedies to that problem. Above all, to conduct successful meeting engagements, forces had to exploit the factors of time and maneuverability.

Finally, the 1987 edition of Reznichenko's work added an extended section on mountain and desert operations, probably derived from experiences in Afghanistan. His description of the utility of enveloping detachments and forward detachments in these special environments also dovetailed closely with descriptions in Sverdlov's book on forward detachment operations.

Other recent works affirm Reznichenko's description of the role and importance of forward detachments. A 1986 work on motorized rifle and tank battalion tactics, edited by Colonel General D. A. Dragunsky, contained lengthy sections which expanded on Reznichenko's description, especially regarding the meeting engagement. Dragunsky emphasized the importance of the battalion in modern combat, stating, "The revived capabilities of the battalion, and the increased signifi-

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

cance of the independent operations of subunits, naturally places great demands on the commander."⁹⁵ Dragunsky's work reflected a growing trend among Soviet theorists, also reflected by actual force structuring, to argue for greater tailoring of forces at regiment and battalion level, so that these forces could operate more independently on the modern battlefield.

An entirely new dimension of forward detachment operations appeared in a 1986 work by M. M. Kir'ian entitled *Vnezapnost'* [Surprise]. Kir'ian cited wartime experience to underscore the role forward detachments played in achieving surprise. By means of rapid operations, forward detachments pre-empted enemy defenses in both the tactical and operational depths, secured river crossings and passages through intermediate defense lines, and sometimes produced general paralysis of enemy command and control. Kir'ian also pointed out the role forward detachments could play in deception plans to hide the direction of main attacks.⁹⁶

By the early 1980s, Soviet military theoreticians began to note openly the potential impact of high-precision weaponry on the battlefield, a reality which placed even higher premium on rapid maneuver. An article published in 1984 stated:

In recent years, conventional means of destruction have undergone rapid development; and today some of these types are distinguished by very high accuracy, long range, rapid fire and great power. In their destructive effectiveness they approximate tactical nuclear weapons. It has become obvious that massive enemy use of such high-precision weapons will lead to a considerable complication of conditions for the conduct of combined arms battle in general, and offensive operations in particular.⁹⁷

The author concluded that, although basic offensive principles still applied, greater premium would have to be placed on "the importance of surprise actions, maneuver of subunits and fires, sharp and continuous cooperation, skill in concealing from the enemy one's intentions, and firm continuous command and control."⁹⁸ In his subsequent description of combat, the author emphasized the role played by forward detachments in all types of combat.

Thereafter, many Soviet writers raised the issue of precision weapons and their impact on combat. In a series of 1987 articles, Major General I. Vorob'ev (the same Vorob'ev who, as a colonel in 1964, wrote the seminal article on forward detachments) sketched out the impact of new weaponry of the 1980s and stated:

THE POST-WAR YEARS: 1946–1985

A striking indicator of tactical maturity of commanders and staffs ... is the use of the principles of maneuver. Its role in all types of battle is very great. For example, maneuver aimed at concentrating forces for a struggle with VTO (*vysokotochnye opuzhiia*) [high-precision weaponry], and with mobile antitank helicopter detachments; maneuver aimed at withdrawing subunits from under strikes; and anti-helicopter maneuver. It is important to hide from the enemy, who is preparing strikes by nuclear weapons and high-precision combat systems, in order to undertake measures in response.

For this, it is necessary to conduct skillfully a dual fire struggle with enemy rapid response fire means; to strike them from the first launch, at the start, and at maximum distances; to counteract actively turning movements, envelopments, and raid operations; to destroy rapidly air landed, amphibious, and diversionary reconnaissance groups; and to conduct false maneuvers on diversionary axes.⁹⁹

By extension, Vorob'ev implied measures similar to these defensive measures could be used on the offensive. As if to confirm this conclusion, a subsequent article in 1988 expanded on Vorob'ev's description of combat. The authors argued that "modern combined arms battle is fought throughout the entire depth of enemy combat formations, both on the sides' contact line [FLOT] and in the depths, on the ground and in the air." Consequently, the fragmented nature of battle will result in "mutual wedging of units and subunits, which will have to operate independently for a long time."¹⁰⁰

The authors recognized the link between forward detachment operations in the Great Patriotic War and the requirements of contemporary combat, stating, "Whereas in the Great Patriotic War such actions were chiefly characteristic of airborne and advance parties, in our day they may become universal."¹⁰¹ Of far greater implication was the authors' open recognition that echelonment would also be affected, as they stated:

In this case, there arises the problem of defining the optimal structure for the first and second echelon at the tactical level. With the enemy using high-precision weapons, the role of the first echelon has to grow. It must be capable of achieving a mission without the second echelon (reserve).¹⁰²

Soviet writings throughout the 1970s and 1980s clearly indicate they believe extensive employment of forward detachments by virtually

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

every force operating at the tactical level will enable the first (single) echelon to accomplish its critical combat mission. The comprehensive description by Sverdlov and a host of other tactical writers has finally and rather completely defined forward detachment roles and missions in contemporary and probably in future combat.

It is rather ironic that, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, while the Soviets intensely studied forward detachment experiences and wrote about their contemporary usefulness, Western open source analysts spent little time on the subject. Where mentioned, they were treated as a tangential aspect of Soviet military art – in essence a curiosity warranting little attention.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

GENERAL

Today, the Soviets believe that future war with or without the use of nuclear weapons will be war by maneuver. Only a measured response involving both firepower and extensive, skillful maneuver can produce offensive success. Since the late 1950s, two major factors have shaped Soviet offensive concepts: the existence of nuclear weapons and extensive conventional offensive experiences. Both factors are reflected in current Soviet operational and tactical techniques. Recently major advances in conventional weaponry, in particular, high-precision weapons, have become a third factor.

The Soviets increasingly doubt that either great power would resort to strategic nuclear war. They likewise feel that an appropriate combination of peacetime political and wartime military measures may reduce the likelihood of nuclear weapons' use even in theater war. As M. M. Kir'ian wrote in 1982:

As weapons have been developed and experience gained in exercises has been synthesized, so has Soviet military science been enriched with new theses on *possible methods of conducting military operations* in the event of a war. The successes of the Soviet Union in the area of military technology and weapons have convinced imperialist strategists both of the doubtfulness of their very concept of utterly defeating the USSR by means of a sudden massed nuclear strike and of the inevitability of retaliation. Refusing to abandon their designs in principle, the aggressive forces of imperialism have come up with the theory of an escalating war – that of unleashing a war, fighting it only with conventional weapons for a time, and making a transition to the use of nuclear weapons at a certain stage (initially tactical and subsequently, if need be, more powerful nuclear weapons). They have not excluded the possibility of engaging in armed conflict while using only conventional weapons. Under these circumstances, Soviet military thought has developed methods of con-

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

ducting military operations both with and without nuclear weapons.¹

During the 1960s the Soviets developed a comprehensive view of how nuclear war would unfold. Kir'ian has provided the clearest general picture:

It has been concluded that in a nuclear war the methods of conducting military operations are based on nuclear strikes and on activities coordinated with them involving other resources. Moreover, the scale and methods of nuclear weapons employment change the nature of troop combat operations, a fact reflected in the further development of the theory of operational art and tactics. Thinking in military theory devoted special attention to working out initial operations, which would be of key importance for the subsequent course of an armed conflict. These operations would be distinguished by decisive objectives, large territorial scope and great dynamism, massed use of diverse resources, intense electronic warfare, difficulty in exercising command and control as a result of active jamming by the enemy, and difficulty in providing logistic support.

The possibility of the defending side creating a stable and deep defense demanded a correspondingly deep operational configuration of attacking forces. The first operational echelon in key sectors was also to include tank formations, which were to be used for a quick advance into the enemy's depth of position, for destroying his nuclear strike weapons in coordination with assault forces, etc. Motorized rifle formations acting in cooperation with tanks were to complete the destruction of surviving enemy groupings. It was recommended to make extensive use of forward detachments, and to penetrate defensive lines in the enemy's operational depth from the line of march. For the most part, tank formations operating in close cooperation with missile troops and aviation were to be used for this purpose.²

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet political and military leadership faced the task of implementing policies which would make nuclear war less likely and of developing military concepts which, when employed, would make it difficult, if not impossible, for a hard-pressed enemy to respond with nuclear weapons, even if it wished to. The political aspect of Soviet policy is apparent in their approach to arms limitations and force reductions. Here the ultimate goal is a de-nuclearized theater of operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the Soviets realize that de-nuclearization will be a long and difficult incremental process (if it ever occurs), they must develop the military aspect of their policy. That aspect has two principal facets. First, the Soviets have addressed the question of pre-emption in theater war. This has involved close and detailed study of “initial periods” of war, in general, in a search for techniques which either produce rapid victory or, conversely, stave off precipitous defeat.³ It has also involved equally detailed study of pre-emption itself – that is those operational and tactical techniques that promise to paralyze either an enemy’s will to resist or his capability to react effectively to large-scale military attack. Under the rubric of antinuclear maneuver, the Soviets have sought methods of conducting offensive operations which would achieve those ends. They believe they have found the answer in the realm of operational and tactical maneuver.

The Soviet military solution to the lurking presence of nuclear and other modern weaponry is, characteristically, a dialectical synthesis of the new and the old – of techniques developed in the 1960s to meet nuclear realities combined with time-honored methods employed in the Great Patriotic War. The resulting synthesis envisions Soviet forces operating in a nuclear-scared configuration employing operational and tactical maneuver in the initial period of war to pre-empt and overcome enemy defenses quickly, to paralyze the enemy’s ability to react, and to win rapid victory within carefully defined political limits.

Through the means of focused operational and tactical maneuver, Soviet forces will crush forward enemy defenses; rapidly penetrate into the depths of the enemy’s defenses along numerous axes; and, by the immediate intermingling of forces and other direct actions, deprive the enemy of an ability to respond with nuclear weapons. As Soviet maneuver unfolds in the depths, consequent paralysis of enemy command and control will ultimately produce paralysis of his will to resist and, hence, his final defeat.

This offensive scheme posits certain distinct requirements. First, the offensive must achieve a degree of surprise to permit the creation of necessary force superiority and to gain initial critical advantage over the enemy. Surprise implies extensive deception to blur attack intentions, to conceal the location and scale of the assault and to mask the principal indicators of impending hostilities.

Second, the Soviets must avoid those actions most indicative of impending attack. That means attacking without large-scale mobilization, which is the most visible and apparent of indicators. This requires extensive preparation of the theater prior to war and development of selective mobilization techniques.⁴

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

Third, to offset the lack of mobilization, to reap maximum surprise, and to generate force necessary to establish high offensive momentum, the Soviets must eschew deep echelonment. They must employ single echelon strategic and operational formations with reserves to back up the offensive.⁵

Finally, they must commit operational and tactical maneuver forces as early as possible in the operation to achieve rapid penetration, to enmesh forces quickly, and to create the very conditions they must create if they are to avoid an enemy nuclear response.

In the ideal, the Soviets will seek to meet these requirements. They well understand, however, that theory and reality seldom match. Thus, while seeking to realize the ideal, they will prepare for operations in less than ideal circumstances.

The Soviets describe the ideal circumstances for an offensive to be an attack against an unprepared defense – defined as a defense manned by security (covering) forces only. The least ideal circumstance is the necessity for assaulting a fully prepared defense. So distasteful is the latter prospect that Soviet writers come close to ruling it out categorically.⁶ An attack on such a defense, in non-nuclear war, would produce a high intensity, probably costly penetration battle of a linear nature. Most important, as the operation developed in favor of one side or the other, there would be the time, the opportunity, and perhaps the inclination available to go nuclear. This prospect negates virtually all the benefits which the Soviets believe can accrue from using operational and tactical maneuver. It also accords to the enemy time necessary to remedy their chief problems in an initial period of war – the problems of forward deployment of forces and weapons, reinforcement, and the movement of reserves.

The manner in which the Soviets conduct operational and tactical maneuver varies across the spectrum of combat, in particular as it relates to the solidity of the defense. In all offensive instances, operational and tactical forces commit to combat as early as possible from positions well forward in the Soviet *front* and army operational formation. Against unprepared defenses, tactical and operational maneuver forces lead the assault, while against partially prepared defenses, tactical maneuver forces lead, supported by heavy fire, to be followed shortly by operational maneuver forces. The task of penetrating prepared defenses is fulfilled by multi-purpose divisions and armies while tactical maneuver forces commence the exploitation and operational maneuver forces continue the exploitation deep into the enemy's operational rear area – all in a matter of a few days. The coherence of the exploitation and pursuit, in all these circumstances,

CONCLUSIONS

depends directly on the well-coordinated operations of tactical and operational maneuver forces and their close interaction with other main force units.

QUANTITY, COMPOSITION, AND TERMINOLOGY

The number, size, and designation of operational and tactical maneuver forces varies in accordance with combat conditions. In general, however, operational maneuver groups function at *front* and army level. Normally *fronts* employ one to two operational maneuver groups of army size. Armies, in turn, normally employ one operational maneuver group of division size. Tactical maneuver forces, in the form of forward (or enveloping) detachments function at the army, division, and regimental level. Armies normally field one regimental-size forward detachment whose mission is tactical/operational, that is, it is expected to perform a mission as deep as the close operational depths of a defense. Divisions normally employ one battalion-size forward detachment; and, on some occasions, regiments may employ a battalion-size forward detachment. Army and divisional forward detachments function during the penetration and pursuit phase of an offensive or on the march in anticipation of a meeting engagement. Regimental forward detachments are employed primarily in an attack against an unprepared (or sometimes partially prepared) defense or during the pursuit and meeting engagement.

In addition, operational maneuver groups of *fronts* and armies extensively employ forward detachments during all phases of operations. *Front* operational maneuver groups use a regiment-size forward detachment of their own and a battalion-size forward detachment for each of their subordinate formations. Army operational maneuver groups also use multiple battalion-size forward detachments for their own operations and for those of their subordinate units.

Forward detachments, at whatever level they are employed, are tailored entities with a broad range of reinforcements designed to permit them to operate independently and, while doing so, survive and complete their mission. Depending on the enemy and the terrain, their nucleus can be either tank or motorized rifle forces.

Because they are both tailored and functional units and subunits, it is probable the Soviets refer to them as corps and brigades. The traditional difference in terminology between division-regiment and corps-brigade is that the former have been and are line formations and units which perform a broad range of combat functions. On the

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

other hand, corps and brigades have been tailored formations and units which have performed an experimental or specific function.⁷ Operational and tactical maneuver traditionally fit into the latter category. Thus, up to the end of the Great Patriotic War, operational maneuver forces were termed armies and corps, while tactical maneuver forces were called brigades. In essence, corps were tailored and reinforced divisions while brigades were tailored and reinforced regiments or battalions. Today it is likely the Soviets have already covertly termed designated operational maneuver forces as armies or corps. It is equally likely that forward detachments are covertly termed brigades (as in the case of an army forward detachment, either corps or brigade).

USE

Forward detachment use depends upon the nature of the defense. The number, composition, nature, and depth of forward detachment operations differs in direct relationship to the firmness of the defense.

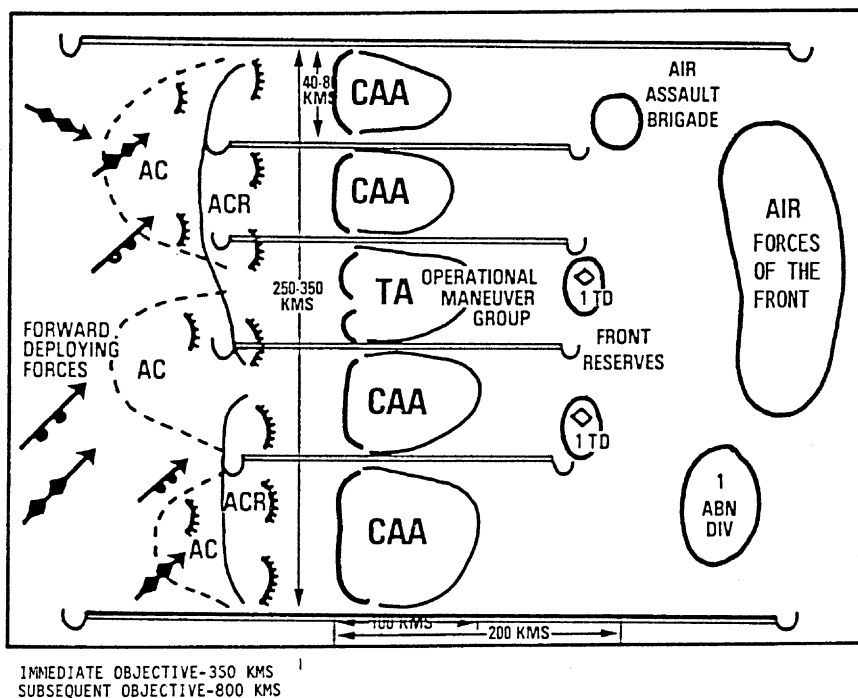
When attacking unprepared defenses (only a deployed enemy covering force), army, division, and regimental forward detachments initiate the assault, penetrate the covering force area, and pre-empt enemy occupation of their main defensive belt (Figures 67–68). The general depths of the forward detachment mission will range as follows:

<i>Forward Detachment</i>	<i>Depth of Mission (kms)</i>
Army	50–80 (close operational depth)
Divisional	30–50 (rear of main defensive area)
Regimental	20–30 (front of main defensive area)

Against partially prepared defenses (in place covering force plus partially occupied main defense area), army and divisional forward detachments, supported by heavy fire, overcome the security zone and penetrate into the main defensive area to forestall establishment of a firm, continuous defense and facilitate the commitment of main force formations and operational maneuver groups (Figures 69–70). Average depths of mission are as follows:

<i>Forward Detachment</i>	<i>Depth of Mission (kms)</i>
Army	30–40 (rear of main defensive area)
Divisional	20–30 (front of main defensive area)

CONCLUSIONS



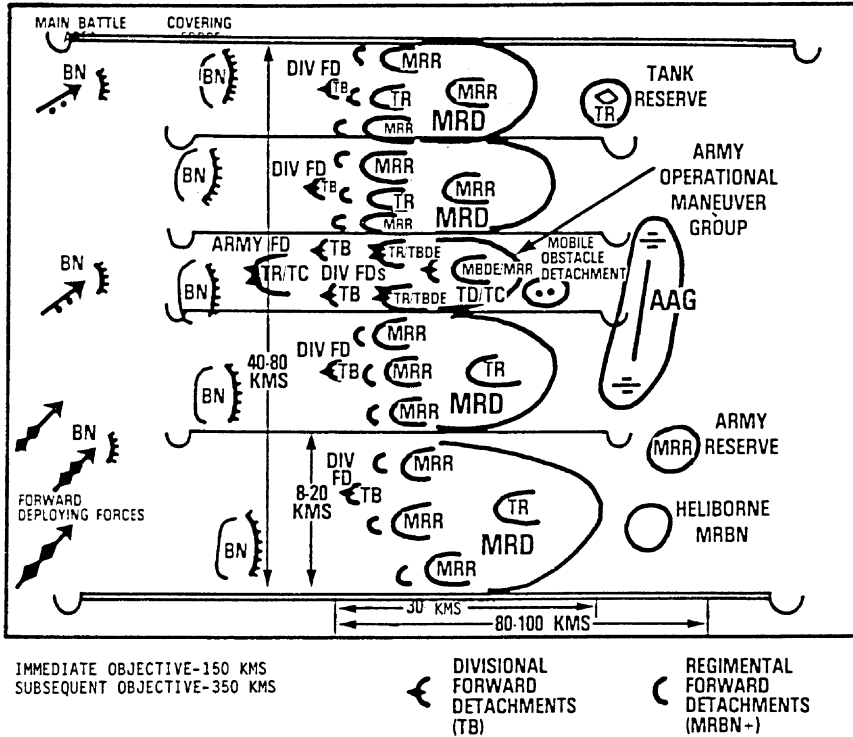
67. Front operational formation: Against an unprepared defense, 1987

In offensives against prepared defenses (fully occupied defenses), forward detachments are designated in advance at army and divisional level (Figures 71–72). However, they do not participate in operations until the penetration phase is complete. In some instances, divisional forward detachments can be used to overcome the security zone or to initiate subsequent attacks on the main defensive area. If they are employed during this phase, they would only be tasked with performing limited missions against specific objectives. It is also unlikely they would emerge capable of conducting subsequent operations, hence the Soviet reluctance to use them during initial phases of the operation.

Should combat be nuclear from the outset, forward detachments lead the attack at all levels of command. Whether combat is nuclear or non-nuclear, once the penetration operation is complete, forward detachments lead the exploitation phase at all command levels.

During the exploitation, forward detachments serving operational

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

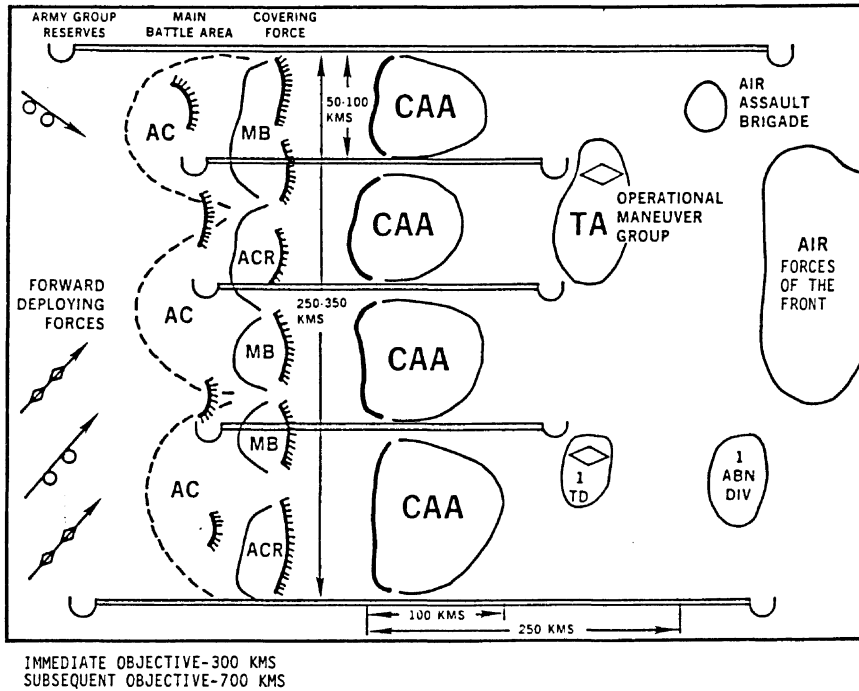


68. Army operational formation: Against an unprepared defense, 1987

maneuver forces and main forces provide the means for maintaining the forward momentum of the entire force. They ensure fragmentation of enemy forces, pre-empt or overcome intermediate enemy defensive positions, and destroy the equilibrium of deploying enemy reserves. All the while, forward detachments provide the essential linkage between operational maneuver and main forces and lend cohesiveness to the entire offensive (Figure 73).

Tactical air assaults in battalion, or sometimes brigade, strength either operate in coordination with ground forward detachments or serve as forward detachments in their own right. An air assault company or battalion under division control participates in operations to overcome a security zone or, as is more likely, the enemy main defensive area. It cooperates with the divisional forward detachments.

CONCLUSIONS



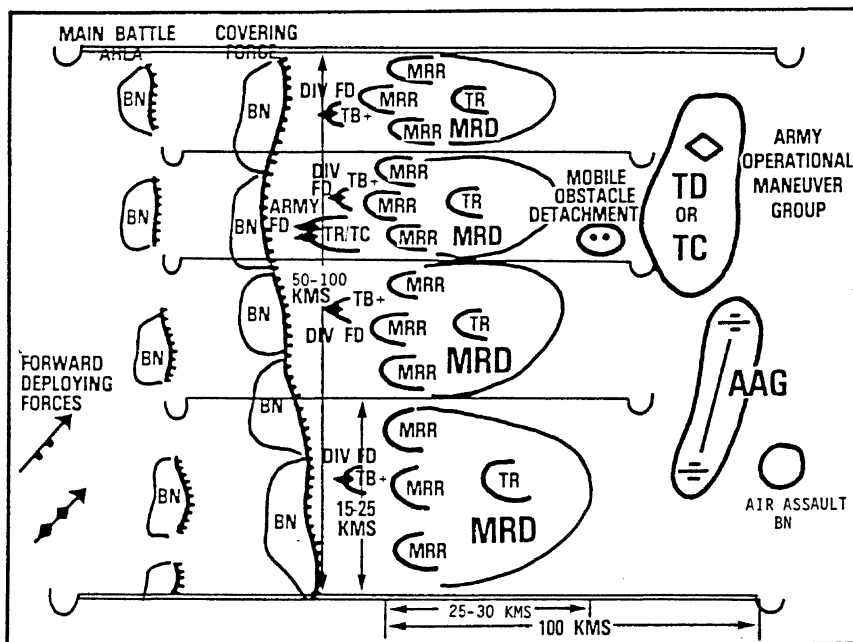
69. Front operational formation: Against a partially prepared defense, 1987

An air assault battalion or brigade conducts similar operations in support of an army forward detachment, usually within the close operational depths (80–120 kilometers) to support the initial advance and subsequent exploitation of an army tactical maneuver force. In essence, air assault forces with their vertical fire support means constitute an air echelon, in its own right, to supplement the existing ground echelon(s).

PROBLEMS AND VULNERABILITIES

Too often the Soviets have portrayed forward detachment operations in a positive light, devoid of all the blemishes and warts which have characterized their evolution. Very simply, tactical maneuver, just as is the case with operational maneuver, has been, is, and will remain, a

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE-120 KMS
SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE-300 KMS

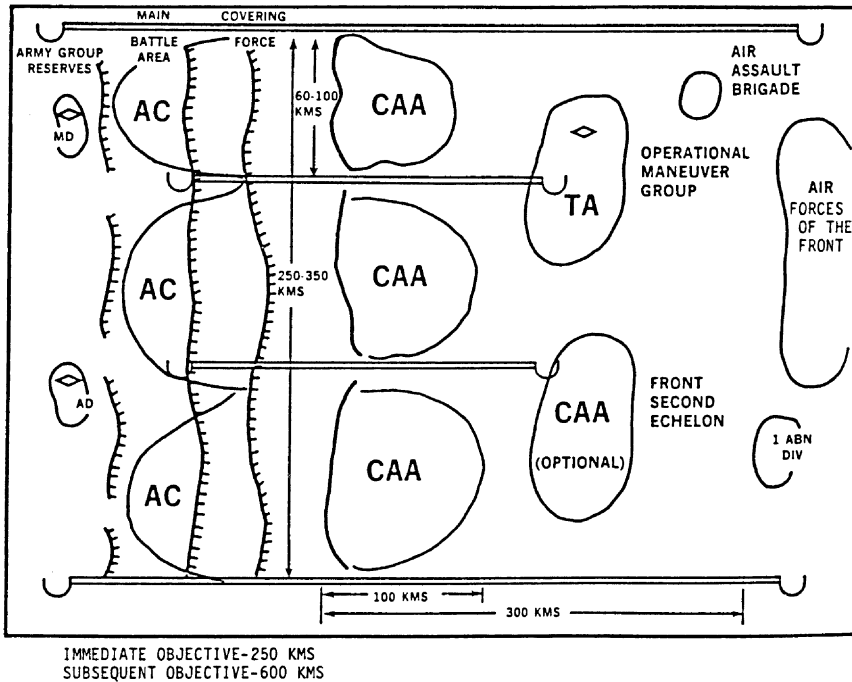
70. Army operational formation: Against a partially prepared defense, 1987

complex endeavor undertaken amidst the uncertainty of combat. On occasion, chance itself has turned well-planned maneuver into tactical disaster. The Soviets understand this fact well, even though they are often loath to talk of it.

Soviet military theorists, commanders, and planners must certainly wrestle with solving problems inherent in forward detachment operations. Among those long-term problems are the following:

- determining the proper size of each forward detachment, at each level of command
- tailoring each detachment to objective conditions
- structuring each detachment for both march and combat survivability (anti-tank, anti-aircraft, logistics, maintenance)
- determining the proper depth of mission
- matching mission depth to the requisite logistical support

CONCLUSIONS



71. Front operational formation: Against a fully prepared defense, 1987

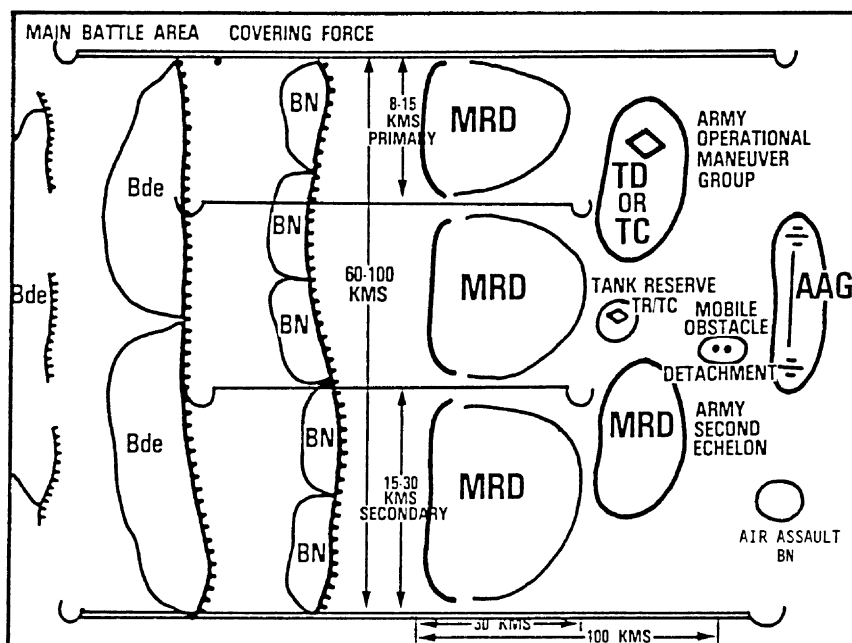
- determining the proper time of commitment of each detachment
- assessing proper length and width of pre-combat formation and the distance between forward detachments and their parent units
- ensuring continuous and effective command and control
- assigning missions which will facilitate achievement of overall tactical and operational objectives

These problems are not unique to tactical maneuver, for they apply to operational maneuver as well.

Failure to solve any one of these problems can lead to severe operational difficulties, if not worse. Just as none of these problems is new or unique, each has also proven in the past difficult to solve, in particular in peacetime.

A last major problem, and hence challenge, for the Soviets rests in

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER



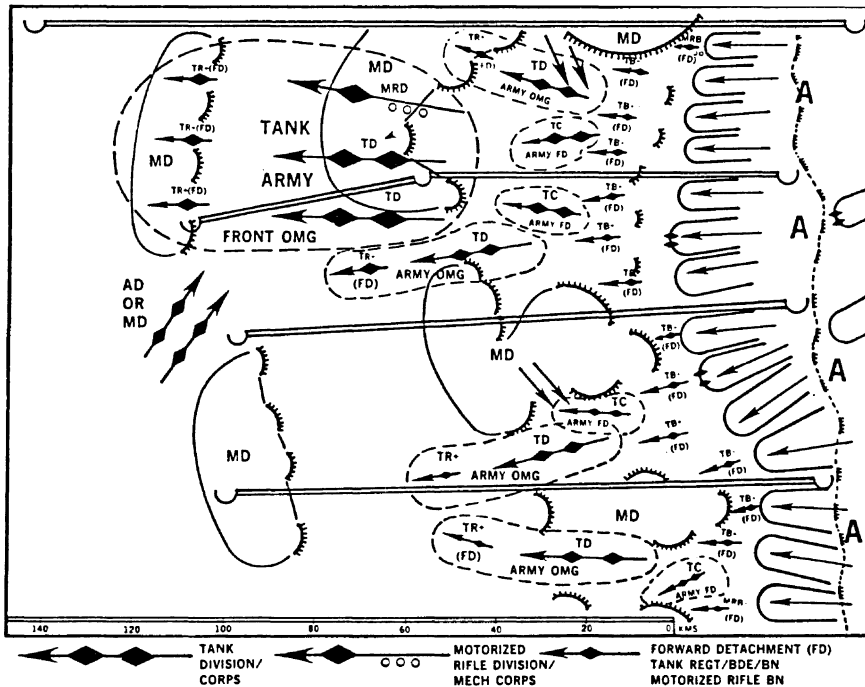
IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE-100 KMS
SUBSEQUENT OBJECTIVE-250 KMS

72. Army operational formation: Against a fully prepared defense, 1987

their continued ability to adjust operational and tactical maneuver concepts to the realities of changing weaponry. A recent Soviet review of Sverdlov's book on forward detachments highlights the dilemma, stating:

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the author has not taken into full account trends in the development of conventional weapons in the armies of the USA and certain other nations of the aggressive NATO bloc. These involve homing missiles, bombs, and shells, high-precision weapons, reconnaissance/strike systems and high-powered charges providing for highly effective target destruction and making it possible to put the "fire and forget" principle into effect. The book should have explained the impact of these weapons upon the combat operations of forward detachments.⁸

CONCLUSIONS



73. Operational and tactical maneuver forces during the exploitation

Certainly this new technological revolution in military affairs will have a major impact on Soviet offensive concepts. They understand that perhaps better than anyone else, and some theorists are postulating that a new period of military development has already begun.⁹ Soviet military theorists are pondering the dilemma and suggesting solutions. In the short term those solutions suggest even greater emphasis on maneuver, tempo, and those qualities and procedures the Soviets have already been stressing.

In the medium and long term, Soviet adjustment to new military realities may require retrenchment and renewed study of the nature of future war. New Soviet declarations of defensiveness may provide a respite for this study. Whether the Soviets stress defense or offense, it is clear that forward detachments will continue to play a major role in what the Soviets firmly believe will be a new period of warfare characterized by the dominance of non-linear combat.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

1. V. A. Kiselev, "Pokhodnyi poriadok" [March formation], *Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopediia* [Soviet military encyclopedia], 8 vols. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976–1980), 6:482. Hereafter cited as SVE with appropriate volume.
2. N. N. Znobin, E. V. Ivanov, "Razvedyvatel'nyi otriad" [Reconnaissance detachment], *SVE*, 7:39.
3. "Razvedyvatel'nyi dozor" [Reconnaissance patrol], *SVE*, 7:38–9.
4. V. I. Beliakov, "Avangard" [Advance guard], *SVE*, 1:12–13.
5. "Golovnaia pokhodnaia zastava" [Advance party], *SVE*, 2:592–3.
6. "Bokovaia pokhodnaia zastava" [Flank party], *SVE*, 1:548; "Tylovaia pokhodnaia zastava" [Rear party], *SVE*, 8:158.
7. "Otriad obespecheniia dvizheniia" [Movement support detachment], *SVE*, 6:169–70.
8. "Khimicheskii razvedyvatel'nyi dozor" [Chemical reconnaissance patrol], *SVE*, 8:374.
9. "Storozhevoi otriad" [Outpost detachment], *SVE*, 7:547.
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11. *Ibid.*
12. "Obkhodiashchii otriad" [Enveloping detachment], *SVE*, 6:676.
13. V. A. Bulatnikov, E. D. Grebish, N. N. Fomin, M. M. Kholodov, "Desant" [Airborne or amphibious assault], *SVE*, 3:152.
14. *Ibid.*
15. "Podvizhnyi otriad zagrazhdenii" [Mobile obstacle detachment], *SVE*, 6:374.

CHAPTER 2

1. F. D. Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady v boiu* [Forward detachments in combat] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986), 34. Hereafter cited as Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady*.
2. *Ibid.*, 35.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 42–43.
6. This chapter and subsequent descriptions of forward detachment operations in offensive and defensive combat and during the meeting engagement are derived primarily from Sverdlov's *Forward Detachment in Combat* and about 50 other articles on forward detachment operations. Notes will mention the other articles, where appropriate, if they differ from or add to Sverdlov's description.
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8. Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady*, 73.
9. *Ibid.*

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2. A. A. Beketov, A. P. Belokon', S. G. Chermashentsev, *Maskirovka deistvii podrazdelenii sukhoputnykh voisk* [Maskirovka actions of ground force subunits] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976). This is the tactical equivalent of the best Soviet work on operational maskirovka, V. I. Matsulenko's *Operativnaia maskirovka voisk* [Operational maskirovka of forces] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1975). For a more detailed and balanced treatment see D. M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1989).
3. Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady*, 100.
4. *Ibid.*, 100–17. For information on the role of the forward detachment during the penetration battle, see also M. Smirnov, "Obespechivaia nastuplenie" [Protecting the offensive], *Voennyi vestnik* [Military Herald], No. 8 (August 1973), 83–8. Hereafter cited as VV with appropriate number and date. I. Skorodumov, "V stremitel'nosti deistvii-zalog uspekha v boiu" [In swiftness of operations – the guarantee of success in combat], VV, No. 5 (May 1973), 11–15; I. Khodulov, "Preodolenie polosy obespecheniia" [Overcoming the security zone], VV, No. 8 (August 1981), 88–91.
5. M. M. Kir'ian, "Armeiskaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia" [Army offensive operation], *SVE*, 1:243.
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THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

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THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

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48. A. I. Radzievsky, ed., *Taktika v boevykh primerakh (diviziia)* [Tactics by combat example (division)] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976), 31.
49. A. Surchenko, "Likvidatsiia proryva v raione Naro-Fominska" [Liquidation of a penetration in the Naro-Fominsk region], *VIZh*, No. 12 (December 1962), 52.
50. G. A. Ostreiko, "Boevye deistviia 35-i strelkovoi i 31-i tankovoi brigad na Solnechnogorskom napravlenii" [Combat actions of the 35th Rifle and 31st Tank Brigades on the Solnechnogorsk axis], *VIZh*, No. 12 (December 1986), 56.
51. D. M. Glantz, *The Soviet Airborne Experience*, Research Survey No. 4 (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1984), 115-21; Sverdlov, *Predovye Otriady*, 9.
52. Sverdlov, *Predovye otriady*, 10.
53. A. Egorov, "Na podstupakh k stolitse" [On the approaches to the capitol], *VV*, No. 2 (February 1982), 14-16; P. Gudzh, "Na legendarnykh rubezhakh" [On legendary lines], *VV*, No. 5 (May 1975), 35-6.
54. Sverdlov, *Predovye otriady*, 10.
55. The tank corps consisted of two, later three, tank brigades, one motorized rifle brigade and support units. Originally its strength was 100 tanks, but by July it numbered 168 tanks. By 1945 the corps consisted of 228 tanks and self-propelled guns. See O. A. Losik, ed., *Stroitel'stvo i boevoe primeneniie Sovetskykh tankovykh voisk v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny* [The formation and combat use of Soviet tank forces in the years of the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow:

NOTES

Voenizdat, 1979), 50–3.

56. I. M. Anan'ev, B. B. Vashelenko, N. T. Konashenko, "Tankovye armii" [Tank armies], *SVE*, 8:665–9. Actual tank army composition was as follows:

<i>1st Tank Army</i>	<i>3d Tank Army</i>	<i>4th Tank Army</i>	<i>5th Tank Army</i>
2 tank corps	2 tank corps	2 tank corps	2 tank corps
1 separate tank brigade	1 motorized rifle division	1 separate tank brigade	1 rifle division
2 rifle divisions	2 rifle divisions	1 antitank brigade	1 separate tank brigade
	1 separate tank brigade	1 rifle division	

57. A. I Radzievsky, *Tankovyi udar* [Tank blow] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1977), 24–5. Initially the Soviets created three types of mechanized corps organized as follows:

<i>Type 1</i>	<i>Type 2</i>	<i>Type 3</i>
3 mechanized brigades	3 mechanized brigades	3 mechanized brigades
1 separate tank brigade	2 tank brigades	2 tank regiments
support units	support units	support units
<i>strength:</i>	<i>strength:</i>	<i>strength:</i>
175 tanks	224 tanks	204 tanks

58. M. Kazakov, "Na voronezhskom napravlenii letom 1942 goda" [On the Voronezh axis in the summer of 1942], *VIZh*, No. 10 (October 1964), 39–41.
59. For details see A. M. Zvartsev, *3-ia gvardeiskaia tankovaia: boevoi put' 3-i gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii* [3d Guards Tank: the combat path of 3d Guards Tank Army] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), 14–27; N. G. Nersesian, *Kievsko-Berlinskii: boevoi put' 6-go gvardeiskogo tankovogo korpusa* [Kiev–Berlin: the combat path of the 6th Guards Tank Corps] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1974), 12–19; A. A. Vetrov, *Tak i bylo* [How it was] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), 81–9.
60. "Some excerpts on the operations of the left flank of the Western Front," *Materials for the Study of Experiences of World War II*, No. E-437, translated by US Army G-2, date unknown, 24–8.
61. F. Utenkov, "Nekotorye voprosy oboronitel'nogo srazheniia na dal'nikh podstupakh k Stalingradu" [Some questions about the defensive battles on the distant approaches to Stalingrad], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1962), 35.
62. *Ibid.*, 38.
63. "Prikaz NKO No. 325 ot 16 oktiabria 1942g." [Order of the People's Commissariat of Defense No. 325 of 16 October 1942], *VIZh*, No. 10 (October 1974), 71. Also available in *Sbornik materialov*, Vol. 2.
64. *Red Army Field Service Regulation 1942*, para. 312, translated by the Chief of the General Staff, Canada, July 1944; *Tactical Manual of the Red Army 1942*, para. 822. Translated by US Army G-2, undated.
65. "Deistviia podvishnoi gruppy 5 tankovoi armii v proryve" [Operations of the mobile group of 5th Tank Army in the penetration], *Sbornik materialov po izucheniiu opyta voyny*, Vo. 6, *aprel'-mai 1943g.* [Collection of materials for the study of war experience, No. 6, April–May 1943] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943), 50–62.
66. *Ibid.*, 58–9.
67. Details of the operation found in *Sbornik materialov po izucheniiu opyta voyny*, No. 8, *avgust'-oktiabr 1943g.* [Collection of materials for the study of war experience, No. 8, August–October 1943] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1943).

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

68. Zvartsev, 34–52.
69. A. G. Ershov, *Osvobozhdenie Donbassa* [The liberation of the Donbas] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1973), 5–87.
70. A. V. Kuzmin, I. I. Krasov, *Kantemirovtsy: boevoi put' 4-go gvardeiskogo tankovogo kantemirovskogo ordena Lenina Krasnoznamennogo korpusa* [Kantemirovtsy: the combat path of the Kantimirovka Order of Lenin, Red Banner 4th Guards Tank Corps] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1973), 57–9.
71. "Nekotorye vyvody po ispol'zovaniu tankovykh i mekhanizirovannykh korpusov dlia razvitiia proryva" [A few observations regarding the employment of tank and mechanized corps in the exploitation of the breakthrough], *Sbornik materialov* No. 8, 75.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*, 76.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*, 78.
77. *Ibid.*, 50–1.
78. Radzievsky, *Tankovy*, 25–7. The January 1943 tank army consisted of two tank corps, one mechanized corps (optional), a motorcycle regiment, an anti-aircraft regiment, an anti-tank regiment, a howitzer artillery regiment, a guards mortar regiment (multiple-rocket launchers), a signal regiment, an aviation communications regiment, a transport regiment, an engineer battalion, and two repair and reconstruction battalions.
79. For details on tank army operations, see A. Kh. Babadzhanian, N. K. Popel', M. A. Shalin, I. M. Kravchenko, *Liuki otkryli v Berline: boevoi put' 1-i gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii* [They opened the way to Berlin: the combat path of 1st Guards Tank Army] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1973), 62–87; P. Ia. Egorov, J. V. Krivoborsky, M. K. Ivlev, A. I. Rogalevich, *Dorogami pobed: boevoi put' 5-i gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii* [By the road to victory: the combat path of 5th Guards Tank Army] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969), 58–71.
80. Babadzhanian, 82–5; V. Frolov, "Tankovoe srazhenie v raione Bogodukhova (1943g)" [Tank battle in the Bogodukhov region (1943)], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1943).
81. Radzievsky, *Tankovy* *udar*, 212.
82. Zvartsev, 86–94.
83. *Ibid.*, 89.
84. M. M. Kir'ian, ed., *Fronty nastupali* [Front attack] (Moscow: "Nauka," 1987), 137.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, 138.
87. M. Sharokhin, "Forsirovanie Dnepra armiei s khodu" [Forcing of the Dnepr by an army on the march], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1963), 54–65; S. Pechenenko, "Gvardeiskaia strelkovaia diviziia v boiakh za Dnepr" [A guards rifle division in the battles for the Dnepr], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1968), 52–9.
88. Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady*, 17.
89. S. Alferov, "Peregripirovka 3-i gvardeiskoi tankovoi armii v bitve za Dnepr" [The regrouping of 3d Guards Tank Army in the battle for the Dnepr], *VIZh*, No. 3 (March 1980), 16–24.
90. Zvartsev, 111–35.
91. *Ibid.*, 124–5; I. I. Iakobovskiy, "Zemlia v ogne" [The land aflame] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1975), 232–42.
92. D. A. Dragunsky, *Gody v brone* [Years in armor] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1973), 126–98.
93. Sverdlov, *Peredovye otriady*, 18.
94. D. M. Glantz, "Nature and Legacy of Soviet Military Deception," *Strategic and*

NOTES

- Operational Deception in the Second World War* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 191.
95. Babadzhanian, 100–17.
 96. *Ibid.*, 117–20; I. F. Dremov, *Nastupala groznaia bronja* [Formidable armor attacked] (Kiev: Politicheskoi literatury Ukrainy, 1981), 58–64; A. G. Getman, *Tanki idut na Berline* [Tanks advance on Berlin] (Moscow: "Nauka," 1973), 153–83; K. P. Korol'kov, *Glubokii reid* [Deep raid] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1967).
 97. Kuzmin, 120–3.
 98. *Ibid.*, 123–5; N. G. Popov, "V peredovom otriade" [In a forward detachment], *VV*, No. 5 (May 1979), 10–13.
 99. "The Korsun-Shevchenkovsky Operation," *1985 Art of War Symposium Transcript of Proceedings* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1985), 115–243.
 100. Egorov, 164–75.
 101. G. T. Zavizion, P. A. Kornushin, *I na Tikhom okeane* [To the Pacific Ocean] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1967), 19–23.
 102. "The Belorussian Operation," *1985 Art of War Symposium Transcript of Proceedings* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1985), 243–449.
 103. G. Kovtunov, "Derzkii zakhvat perepravy" [Daring seizure of crossings], *VIZh*, No. 7 (July 1982), 39–45; A. Beloborodov, "43-ia armii v Vitebskoi operatsii" [The 43d Army in the Vitebsk operation], *VIZh*, No. 6 (June 1970), 5–55; S. P. Kuriukhin, *43-ia armii v Vitebskom operatsii* [43d Army in the Vitebsk operation] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1961).
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 105. Egorov, 252–3.
 106. Sukhachev, 59–63.
 107. Zvartsev, 169–172; D. D. Leliushenko, *Moskva–Stalingrad–Berlin–Praga* [Moscow–Stalingrad–Berlin–Prague] (Moscow: "Nauka," 1985), 250–69.
 108. S. Petrov, "Dostizhenie vnezapnosti v L'vovsko–Sandomirskoi operatsii" [The achievement of surprise in the L'vov–Sandomierz operation], *VIZh*, No. 7 (July 1974), 33–5.
 109. Babadzhanian, 199–201; A. Getman, "Groza nad visloi" [Storm over the Vistula], *VV*, No. 8 (August 1974), 11–15.
 110. F. I. Vysotsky, M. E. Makukhin, F. M. Sarychev, M. K. Shaposhnikov, *Gvardeiskaia tankovaia* [Guards tank] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963), 112–21.
 111. K. V. Sychev, M. M. Malakhov, eds., *Nastuplenie strelkovogo korpusa* [Offensive of a rifle corps] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1958), 295–6.
 112. *Ibid.*, 297.
 113. Vysotsky, 122–130; I. M. Anan'ev, *Tankovye armii v nastuplenii: Po opytu velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny 1941–1945gg.* [Tank armies on the offensive: Based on the experience of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), 310–14.
 114. "The Yassy–Kishinev Operation," *1985 Art of War Symposium Transcript of Proceedings* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 1985), 449–539.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

115. V. A. Matsulenko, *Udar s dnestrovskogo platsdarme* [Strike from the Dnestr bridgehead] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1961), 87–160.
116. Zavizion, 61–89.
117. *Polevoi ustav Krasnoi Armii 1944* [Field regulations of the Red Army 1944] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1944), para. 330. Translated by JPRS, 17 January 1985.
118. *Ibid.*, para. 365.
119. *Ibid.*, para. 443.
120. *Ibid.*, para. 467.
121. *Ibid.*, para. 740.
122. "Nastavlenie po proryvu pozitsionnoi oborony (proekt)" [Instructions for the penetration of a positional defense (project)], *VIZh*, No. 3 (March 1974), 75.
123. *Ibid.*, 75–6.
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127. Babadzhanian, 228–9.
128. F. Bokov, "Peredovoi otriad 5-i udarnoi armii v vislo–oderskoi operatsii" [Forward detachment of 5th Shock Army in the Vistula–Oder operation], *VIZh*, No. 1 (January 1970), 42–9.
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130. "The Vistula–Oder Operation," 609–27.
131. Leliushenko, 287–97.
132. Babadzhanian, 234–5, 239–47.
133. Leliushenko, 296–300; Kh. Sidzhakh, "Zakhvat mosta cherez Vartu" [Seizure of a bridge across the Wartal], *VV*, No. 10 (October 1987), 15–17; N. Kireev, "Forsirovanie odera 4-i tankovoi armii" [Forcing the Oder by 4th Tank Army], *VIZh*, No. 4 (April, 1976), 95–100.
134. Zvartsev, 210–13.
135. Vysotsky, 160–2; M.D. Solomatin, *Krasnogradtsy* [Men of Krasnograd] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963), 156–8.
136. Babadzhanian, 252–7; A. Katukov, "Brosok cherez ukreplennyi raion k oder" [A bound across a fortified region to the Oder], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1972), 60–7.
137. I. Krupchenko, "Tankovye armii v Berlinskoi operatsii" [Tank armies in the Berlin operation], *VIZh*, No. 7 (July 1960), 18–27.
138. For a contemporary critique of tank operations in April 1945, see "Iz doklada komanduiushchego bronetankovymi i mekhanizirovannymi voiskami Gruppy sovetских voisk v Germanii marshala bronetankovoy voisk P.A. Rotmistrova na voenno–nauchnoi konferentsii po izucheniiu Berlinskoi operatsii" [From a report of Marshal of Armored Forces P.A. Rotmistrov, commander of armored and mechanized forces of the Soviet Group of Forces, Germany, at a military–scientific conference on studying the Berlin operation], *VIZh*, No. 9 (September 1985), 43–59.
139. D.M. Glantz, *August Storm: Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria*, Leavenworth Paper No. 7 (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983); D.M. Glantz, *August Storm: Soviet Tactical and Operational Combat in Manchuria 1945*, Leavenworth Paper No. 8 (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1983).

NOTES

CHAPTER 7

1. "Iz doklada ... Rotmistrova. ..."
2. The mechanized army consisted of two tank divisions, two mechanized divisions, and support units with about 1,000 tanks and self-propelled guns. See A. Dunin, "Razvitie sukhoputnykh voisk v poslevoennyi period" [The development of the ground forces in the post-war period], *VIZh*, No. 5 (May 1978), 34–5.
3. The mechanized division consisted of three mechanized regiments, a medium tank regiment, a heavy tank/self-propelled gun regiment and support units. Initially it numbered 260 tanks and self-propelled guns and, later, 349. The tank division had three medium tank regiments, one heavy tank/self-propelled gun regiment, one motorized rifle regiment, and support units. Its armor strength ranged from 336 to 484 tanks and self-propelled guns. See *Soviet Army Organization, the Tank Division and the Mechanized Division* (Washington, D. C.: OACSI, January 1954).
4. The post-war rifle corps consisted of two–three rifle divisions, one mechanized division, and support units. The rifle division had three rifle regiments, two artillery regiments, a medium tank/self-propelled gun regiment, and supporting subunits. The armor strength of the division rose to 88 tanks/self-propelled guns by 1954. See "New Soviet Wartime Divisional TOE," *Intelligence Research Project No. 9520* (Washington, D. C.: OACSI, 15 February 1956).
5. N. Kireev, "Primenenie tankovykh podrazdelenii i chastei pri proryve oborony protivnika" [The use of tank subunits and units during the penetration of an enemy defense], *VIZh*, No. 2 (February 1982), 33.
6. *Ibid.*, 34.
7. N. P. Polev, "Offensive Operations of the Rifle Corps," *A Frunze Academy Lesson* (Moscow: M. V. Frunze Academy, October 1945), 65. Translated by USA G–2.
8. *Ibid.*
9. N. P. Polev, "Offensive Operations of a Rifle Division," *A Frunze Academy Lesson* (Moscow: M. V. Frunze Academy, 1945–46), 20. Translated by USA G–2.
10. Polev, "Offensive Operations of the Rifle Corps," 66.
11. *Ibid.*, 68.
12. M. Sakhno, "Tactical Control of the Tank Corps in the Exploitation of a Break-through," *Zhurnal Bronetankovykh i Mekhanizirovannykh voisk* [Journal of Armored and Mechanized forces], No. 6 (June 1945), 1. Translated by Eurasian Branch OAC of S, G–2. Hereafter cited as *BMV*. See also A. Kliuchkov, "The Tank Battalion in the Forward Element (Detachment)," *BMV*, No. 7 (July 1946), 1–13. Translated by Eurasian Branch OAC of S, G–2.
13. *Ibid.*, 6.
14. *The Soviet Army: Tactics and Organization, 1949* (London: The War Office, April 1949), 14.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 39.
18. Dunin, 38. At this point, Soviet description of their force structure shifts into use of generic terms and comparisons between old and new units on the basis of percentage changes in strength and firepower. More detail is available in "Recent Changes in Soviet Divisional Organization," *Intelligence Review*, No. 222 (August–September 1955), 10–14; "Organizational Employment of Soviet Line Divisions," *Intelligence Review*, No. 254 (July 1962), 9–12.
The tank army consisted of four tank divisions, an optional motorized rifle division, and supporting units with 1,400 to 1,500 tank and self-propelled guns.

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

The motorized rifle division consisted of three motorized rifle regiments, a medium tank regiment, and support subunits and totalled 220 tanks and self-propelled guns.

19. Kireev, "Primenenie tankovykh podrazdelenii," 37.
20. *Ibid.*
21. K. S. Kolganov, *Razvitie taktiki sovetskoi armii v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny (1941-1945gg.)* [The development of Soviet Army tactics in the years of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945)] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1958), 5. The operational context for this work is found in V. A. Semenov, *Kratkii ocherk razvitiia Sovetskogo operativnogo iskusstva* [A short survey of the development of Soviet military art] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1960).
22. "Soviet Tactics: Medium Tank Regiment," *Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 30-77* (Washington, D. C.: Headquarters, Dept of the Army, November 1960), 2.
23. *Ibid.*
24. "Soviet Tactics: Motorized Rifle Regiment," *Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 30-72* (Washington, D. C.: Headquarters, Dept of the Army, April 1960), 2.
25. *Ibid.*, 3.
26. V. D. Sokolovsky, *Voennaia strategii* [Military strategy] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963), 383.
27. The clearest exposition of this view is found in A. A. Stokov, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva* [A history of military art] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966), 595-617.
28. Dunin, 38-9; "Soviet Field Armies: Organizational and Operational Concepts," *Intelligence Research Project*, No. P3-10 (Washington, D.C.: OACSI, 1962), declassified. Average size wartime *fronts* would consist of a mixture of combined arms and tank armies: the combined arms army of three or four motorized rifle divisions and one tank division and the tank army of two to four medium tank divisions; possibly one heavy tank division; and, under special circumstances, a motorized rifle division. By 1968 the motorized rifle division strength had decreased to 10,500 men and 188 tanks. At the same time, the tank division converted its heavy tank regiment to a third medium tank regiment; and its strength fell to 9,000 men and 325 tanks.
29. I. Vorob'ev, "Peredovye otriady v nastupatel'noi operatsii i boiu" [Forward detachments in offensive operations and battles], *VM*, No. 4 (April 1965), 39.
30. *Ibid.*, 39-44.
31. *Ibid.*, 41.
32. *Ibid.*, 43.
33. A. Zhilin, "Nekotorye voprosy vstrechnogo srazheniia krupnykh tankovykh gruppirovok" [Some questions concerning a meeting battle of large tank groups], *VM*, No. 2 (February 1964), 28.
34. Kireev, "Primenenie tankovykh podrazdelenii," 37.
35. *Ibid.*, 38.
36. V. Reznichenko, "Voprosy sovremennogo obschevioskovogo boia" [Questions of contemporary combined arms combat], *VM*, No. 3 (March 1964), 31.
37. L. Korzun, "O presledovanii v sovremennykh usloviakh" [Concerning the pursuit in contemporary conditions], *VM*, No. 7 (July 1964), 37.
38. *Ibid.*
39. P. Kurochkin, "Deistviia tankovykh armii v operativnoi glubine" [Operations of tank armies in the operational depth], *VM*, No. 11 (November 1964), 65.
40. V. Fedorenko, "Tankovyie i mekhanizirovannye korpusa v nastupatel'nykh operatsiiakh Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny" [Tank and mechanized corps in offensive operations of the Great Patriotic War], *VM*, No. 4 (April 1965), 54-67.
41. D. F. Loza, S. I. Garbuz, I. F. Sazonoi, *Motostrelkovyi batal'on v sovremennom boiu* [The motorized rifle battalion in modern combat] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1965), 5. Translated by FSTC.
42. *Ibid.*

NOTES

43. *Ibid.*, 25.
44. I. S. Liutov, P. T. Sagaidak, *Motostrelkovyi batal'on v takticheskome vozdušnom desante* [The motorized rifle battalion in a tactical air assault] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969), 10. For other late 1960s works incorporating the use of forward detachments, see Iu. Z. Novikov, F. D. Sverdlov, *Manevr v obshchevoiskovom boiu* [Maneuver in combined arms combat] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1967), which stresses the role of forward detachments in the pursuit, and D. F. Loza, *Marsh i vstrechnyi boi* [The march and meeting engagement] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1968), which details the role of forward detachments in those circumstances.
45. V. G. Reznichenko, *Taktika* [Tactics] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1966), 221.
46. *Ibid.*, 225.
47. *Ibid.*, 290.
48. *Ibid.*, 315.
49. *Ibid.*, 317.
50. *Ibid.*, 356.
51. "Soviet Tactics," *Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 30-73* (Washington, D. C.: Headquarters, Dept of the Army, October 1961), 44.
52. *Ibid.*, 47.
53. *Ibid.*, 65.
54. *Ibid.*, 71.
55. *Ibid.*, 73.
56. *Ibid.*, 75.
57. *Ibid.*, 83.
58. *Ibid.*, 86.
59. *Soviet Armed Forces Motorized Rifle Division, AP-220-3-9-68-INT* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, February 1968).
60. For example, see I. Kh. Bagramian, ed., *Voennaia istoriia* [Military history] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971), 345.
61. Kurochkin, "Deistviia tankovykh armii," *Voprosy strategii*.
62. F. D. Sverdlov, *Maneuver in Land Warfare* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967), 29. Polish articles referring to operational maneuver groups began appearing in 1981 and have continued to appear in even greater frequency. For a selection of recent articles, see *Selected Translations from the Polish Military Press*, Volume 1 (Ft. Leavenworth, KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, 1987), 141-60. Translated by Harold Orenstein.
63. See TOEs in Headquarters, Department of the Army *FM 100-2-3*, "Soviet Army Troop Organization and Equipment," July 1984, 4-48.
64. V. Savkin, "Cherty sovremennogo boia" [Characteristics of modern battle], *VV*, No. 3 (March 1974), 24.
65. V. E. Savkin, *Osnovnye printsipy operativnogo iskusstva i taktiki* [Basic Principles of Operational Art and Tactics] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1972), 196. Translated by US Air Force.
66. *Ibid.*, 228.
67. F. Sverdlov, "K voprosy o manevr v boiu" [Concerning the question of maneuver in combat], *VV*, No. 8 (August 1972), 31.
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THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

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CHAPTER 8

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3. Extensive Soviet analysis of this theme of initial war has produced many studies, including S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi period voyny* [The initial period of war]

NOTES

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4. This includes such measures as the build-up of war material stockages in the forward area, establishment of cadre, spin-off type formations satellited off existing forces, creation or maintenance of a false order of battle, and use of special transport techniques to facilitate selective high speed mobilization and reinforcement.
 5. A single echelon strategic deployment and operational formation does not negate the requirement to form tactical forces in two echelons if required by either enemy dispositions or terrain considerations.
 6. Since the mid-1960s, numerous Soviet military writers have renounced the possibility or wisdom of conducting classic frontal penetration operations which they call "progyzaniia" [gnawing through] the defense. For example, see Stokov, 616.
 7. For example, since 1930 virtually all Soviet forces which were either experimental or created to fulfill specific functions were designated corps and brigades. In the pre-war period these included tank, mechanized, armored car, and air assault brigades and tank, mechanized and airborne corps. These formations conducted operational or tactical maneuver while tank and mechanized regiments and battalions provided routine support for rifle formations. During the Great Patriotic War, tank, mechanized, motorized rifle, and airborne corps and brigades performed operational and tactical maneuver as mobile groups, forward detachments, or air assault forces. At the same time, tank regiments and battalions provided routine armor support for line units. Airborne divisions emerged in late 1942 when they began to be employed as regular ground rifle formations. For the remainder of the war, the Soviets maintained the general purpose airborne divisions and functional air assault brigades. During wartime a variety of corps and brigades (artillery, sapper, tank destroyer, etc.) performed functional missions. The rifle corps was something of an exception; but, then, it was a non-TOE, tailorable, tactical headquarters.

In the immediate post-war years, the distinction of division-regiment and corps-brigade blurred because all forces had become mobile and armor had spread almost uniformly throughout the force. The brigade terminology was retained for specialized support units (artillery, antitank). In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, as Soviet concern for maneuver in a potentially conventional environment revived, so also did the use of the older terms "corps" and "brigades." Today various types of brigades (air assault, diversionary, heavy artillery) exist. In addition, brigades appeared in Afghanistan (motorized rifle), which seemed to be tailored entities possessing a distinct maneuver function. Separate (so-called independent) tank battalions in Soviet motorized rifle divisions of GSFG are organized in a similar way to older tank brigades and seem to warrant the designation brigade. The somewhat larger separate tank regiment assigned to

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

armies is analogous to the separate tank battalion and may be termed brigade or corps.

8. Reznichenko, in his 1987 edition of *Taktika*, differentiates between ground and air echelons, stating:

While analyzing the future development of offensive combat tactics, one can propose that, under the influence of modern weapons and the greater saturation of ground forces with aviation means, the combat formation of forces on the offensive is destined to consist of two echelons – a ground echelon, whose mission will be to fulfill the penetration of the enemy defense and develop the success into the depths, and an air echelon created to envelop defending forces from the air and strike blows against his rear area. (p. 206)

Hence, throughout *Taktika*, while referring to Western air-land battle, Reznichenko refers to Soviet “land-air battle.”

9. P. Lashchenko, “Operations of the Forward Detachment,” *KZ*, 5 August 1986, 2. Translated by JPRS, 17 December 1986.
10. In a recent review of a book by A. Babakov on the Soviet armed forces in the post-war years, A. Reznichenko challenges Babakov’s description of post-war periods of military development. Babakov postulated that the distinct periods were 1945–1953, 1954–1961, 1962–1972, and 1973–1986. Reznichenko argues for the subdivision of 1945–1960, 1961–1970, and 1971–1985. His argument clearly delineates the period of the revolution in military affairs (1961–1970) and the period when the Soviets adopted a dual option (1971–1985). He strongly implies that a new period has begun in the mid-1980s characterized by the rapid changing pace of conventional technology and the emergence of high-precision weaponry as the first noticeable facet of that change. The growing importance of the new weaponry will probably accentuate techniques the Soviets developed in the 1970s to deal with the menacing presence of nuclear weapons. Specifically, the Soviets will develop further operational and tactical maneuver techniques aimed at pre-empting or neutralizing effective enemy use of any weapons of mass destruction, nuclear or conventional. See V. Reznichenko, “Sovetskie vooruzhennye sily v posle-voennyi period” [The Soviet armed forces in the post-war period], *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil* [Communists of the armed forces], No. 1 (January 1988), 86–8.

INDEX

- advance guard [*avangard*], 2–4, 54–5, 72, 74, 77–80, 83–5, 87, 90, 92, 119, 178, 198–9, 202, 209, 211, 222–3
- advance party [*golovnyi pokhodnyi zastav* – GPZ], 2–4, 26–30, 39, 41, 55–6, 58, 71–2, 104, 198
- Afghanistan, 223
- Alabushev, Major N. M., 104
- Altukhovo, 112
- anti-nuclear maneuver [*protivoyadernyi maneuver*], 216–17
- Armies, German
 - Third Panzer, 170
 - Fourth Panzer, 121, 135, 141
 - Sixth, 116–17, 121, 173, 176
- Armies, Italian
 - Eighth, 125
- Armies, Japanese
 - Kwantung, 188
- Armies, Soviet
 - 1st Guards, 153
 - 1st Guards Tank, 170, 172, 181–2, 185
 - 1st Tank, 135, 138, 153–4, 157, 159
 - 2d Guards Tank, 181, 185
 - 2d Tank, 172–3
 - 3d Guards Tank, 141–3, 146–8, 153, 170, 173, 181–2
 - 3d Tank, 116, 123, 126
 - 4th Guards Tank, 181–2
 - 4th Tank, 170
 - 5th, 190
 - 5th Guards, 135, 161
 - 5th Guards Tank, 135, 138, 163, 165, 170
 - 5th Tank, 116, 123
 - 6th Guards, 135, 168
 - 6th Guards Tank, 188–90
 - 6th Tank, 161, 163, 165, 173, 176
 - 8th Guards, 172–3
 - 13th, 154
 - 15th, 190
 - 16th, 116
 - 18th, 153
 - 25th, 190
 - 30th, 113
 - 33d, 113
 - 36th, 190
 - 37th, 146
 - 38th, 146–7, 153, 157
 - 39th, 188–9
 - 40th, 141, 163
 - 43d, 168
 - 47th, 172
 - 49th, 112, 168
 - 60th, 154, 159
 - 61st, 116–17
 - 62d, 117
 - 64th, 117
 - 69th, 172–3, 181
- Army Detachment Kempf, 135
- Army Groups, German
 - Center, 112, 152, 168, 170
 - Don, 122, 126
 - North, 152
 - North Ukraine, 152
 - South Ukraine, 152, 173, 176
- Baltic Sea, 152, 180
- Battalions, Soviet
 - 15th Reconnaissance, 125
 - 381st Tank, 159
- Belgorod, 122, 134
- Belgorod–Khar'kov operation (August 1943), 134–41, 148
- Belorussia, 152
- Belorussian operation (June–July 1944), 152, 168–9, 180
- Bendary, 173
- Berdichev, 154, 159
- Berezina River, 170
- Bereznegovatia–Snigirevka operation (March 1944), 153
- Berlin, 153, 185, 188, 190
- Berlin operation (April–May 1945), 152, 185, 188, 194
- Black Sea, 121
- Blau, German Operation (June–September 1942), 116
- Bobruisk, 168, 170
- Bogdanov, Lieutenant General S. I., 172
- Bogodukhov, 135
- Borskova, 157

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

- Breslau, 185
 Brest, 170
 Brigades, Soviet
 1st Guards Tank, 138, 154, 157, 170–1, 181–2, 185
 3d Guards Motorized Rifle, 161
 4th Guards Tank, 170
 6th Naval Infantry, 113
 8th Tank, 113
 12th Guards Tank, 159, 161
 13th Guards Tank, 159, 161
 14th Guards Tank, 126, 159, 161
 14th Motorized Rifle, 125
 17th Guards Tank, 170
 17th Mechanized, 182
 18th Rifle, 112
 19th Mechanized, 138
 20th Guards Mechanized, 157
 24th Tank, 113
 27th Guards Motorized Rifle, 157
 30th Rifle, 112
 31st Rifle, 113
 31st Tank, 113
 40th Guards Tank, 154, 157
 44th Guards Tank, 181–2, 185
 45th Guards Tank, 154, 157
 49th Tank, 138
 51st Guards Tank, 141, 147
 54th Guards Tank, 141
 55th Guards Tank, 148
 61st Guards Tank, 182
 69th Mechanized, 141
 71st Mechanized, 148
 76th Tank, 190
 91st Tank, 141, 147
 93d Guards Tank, 182
 112th Tank, 138
 155th Tank, 163, 165
 157th Tank, 125
 171st Tank, 190
 195th Tank, 126
 205th Tank, 190
 220th Tank, 181
 233d Tank, 163, 165
 Brody, 98
 Brusilov, 153
 Bucharest, 173, 176
 Bulgaria, 74
 Burmasov, Major General V. A., 190

 Carpathian Mountains, 180
 chemical reconnaissance patrol
 [*khimicheskii razvedivatel'nyi otriad*], 2, 4, 56
 Cherkassy, 163
 Cherniakhovsky, Colonel I. D., 98
 Chernovoarmeisk, 159
 Chiamussu, 190
 China, 88, 90
 Chir River, 117, 125
 Civil War, Russian, 75
 Civil War, U.S., 75
 combat formation [*voevoi poriadok*], 1, 16, 24
 Corps, German
 IV SS Panzer, 173
 XIII Army, 159
 XXXXVII Panzer, 173
 LIX Army, 159
 Corps, Soviet
 1st Guards Mechanized, 123, 125
 1st Guards Tank, 123, 128, 169–70
 1st Tank, 116, 123, 124, 170
 2d Guards Mechanized, 123
 2d Guards Tank, 123, 170
 3d Guards Mechanized, 123, 170
 3d Guards Tank, 123
 3d Mechanized, 98, 135, 138
 3d Tank, 123, 126, 172–3
 4th Guards Mechanized, 123, 128, 173
 4th Guards Tank, 123, 126, 129–30, 154, 159–61, 181
 4th Mechanized, 123, 125
 4th Tank, 123
 5th Airborne, 113–14
 5th Guards Mechanized, 123
 5th Guards Tank, 123, 154, 163, 165
 5th Mechanized, 163, 165
 6th Guards Tank, 141, 147–8
 6th Mechanized, 123
 6th Tank, 135
 7th Guards Tank, 141, 147–8
 7th Mechanized, 173
 7th Tank, 116, 123
 8th Guards Mechanized, 154, 157, 182
 8th Guards Tank Corps, 173
 8th Mechanized, 98, 104, 108
 9th Mechanized, 98, 104, 141, 147–8
 9th Tank, 170
 10th Guards Tank, 182
 10th Mechanized, 190
 10th Tank, 123, 126
 11th Guards Tank, 154, 157, 182
 12th Mechanized, 98
 12th Tank, 123, 126
 13th Tank, 123
 15th Mechanized, 98
 15th Tank, 123, 126

INDEX

- 16th Tank, 116, 123, 128, 172
- 17th Tank, 123, 125–6, 130
- 18th Tank, 123, 125–6, 163
- 19th Mechanized, 98, 104
- 20th Tank, 163
- 22d Mechanized, 98
- 24th Tank, 123, 125–6
- 25th Tank, 123, 125, 154, 181
- 26th Tank, 123
- 29th Tank, 163
- 31st Tank, 138, 181
- 91st Rifle, 172
- corps volant* [*korvolan*], 74
- Crimean operation (April–May 1944), 153
- Czestochowa, 182–5
- “deep battle,” concept of, 76–7, 80–1, 214
- “deep operations,” concept of, 76, 80, 96, 168, 214
- Desna River, 143
- distant action tanks [*dal'nyi deistvie* – DD], 81–2, 85, 87–9
- distant infantry support tanks [*dal'naia podderzhka pekhoty* – DPP], 82
- Divisions, German
 - Herman Goering Parachute Panzer, 173
 - 4th Mountain, 157
 - 6th Panzer, 173
 - 7th Panzer, 161
 - 10th Panzer Grenadier, 141
 - 11th Panzer, 98
 - 16th Panzer, 108, 154, 157, 182
 - 17th Panzer, 182
 - 19th Panzer, 141, 173
 - 25th Panzer, 147
 - 67th Infantry, 141
 - 101st Jaeger, 154, 157
 - 208th Infantry, 161
 - 213th Security, 159
 - 254th Infantry, 157
 - 371st Infantry, 154, 157
- Divisions, Soviet
 - 8th Guards Rifle, 112
 - 10th Tank, 98
 - 12th Tank, 108
 - 20th Tank, 104
 - 28th Tank, 98
 - 34th Tank, 108
 - 35th Tank, 104
 - 37th Tank, 98
 - 43d Tank, 104
 - 46th Tank, 104
 - 61st Tank, 188, 190
 - 117th Rifle, 172
 - 194th Rifle, 112
- Dnepr River, 121–2, 134–5, 138, 141, 143, 146, 153, 163
- Dnestr River, 173
- Don River, 97, 117, 121–2, 125
- Donbas (see Donets Basin)
- Donbas operation (January–February 1943), 122–3, 126
- Donets Basin, 122, 146
- Dragunsky, Colonel General D. A., 223–4
- Dubno, 98, 104, 108
- Durovo, 112
- East Prussia, 152
- East Prussian operation (January–February 1945), 180, 185
- echelon to exploit success [*eshelon razvitie proryv* – ERP] (see mobile group)
- enveloping detachment [*obkhodiashchii otriad*], 2, 7–8, 48, 223
- Fastov, 147–8
- Fedorenko, Colonel V., 208
- Feklenko, Major General N. V., 104
- Field Service Regulations
 - 1929, 76, 78–80, 83
 - 1936, 76, 80, 85–6, 88–90
 - 1941, 92
 - 1942, 119
 - 1943, 143
 - 1944, 178–9
- Filippov, Lieutenant Colonel N., 125
- Filippovka, 112
- Finland, 88
- First World War, 75–6
- Five Year Plan, 80
- flank party [*bpkovyi pokhodnyi zastav* – BPZ], 2–3, 41, 104
- flying corps [*letuchii korpus*], 74
- flying detachment [*letuchii otriad*], 74
- France, 90
- Fronts, Soviet
 - Briansk, 123
 - Central, 143
 - Don, 123
 - North Caucasus, 123
 - Northwestern, 98
 - Southern, 123, 146, 148
 - Southwestern, 123, 125, 143
 - Stalingrad, 117, 123
 - Steppe, 143, 146

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

- Trans-Baikal, 188
 Voronezh, 123, 135, 141, 143, 146
 Western, 112
 1st Baltic, 180
 1st Belorussian, 172, 180–1, 185
 1st Ukrainian, 146, 163, 170, 172, 176, 180–1, 188
 2d Belorussian, 180
 2d Ukrainian, 163, 165, 173
 3d Belorussian, 180
 3d Ukrainian, 173
 Fuchin, 190

 General Staff (Soviet), 122, 128
 Gnivan, 154, 157
 Gostishevo, 112
 Grand Khingan Mountains, 188
 Group of Occupation Forces Germany (GOFG), 215
 Gurko, General I. V., 74

 Hailar, 190
 Halung–Arshaan Fortified Zone, 190

 Iaryshevka, 154
 Iassy, 173
 Iassy–Kishinev operation (August 1944), 168, 177
 Ikva River, 104
 immediate infantry support tanks [*neposredstvennaia podderzhka pekhoty* – NPP], 81–2, 85
 infantry support tank group [*tanki podderzhki pekhoty* – TPP], 90
 Irpen River, 154
 Isserson, G., 87
 Iukhnov, 113

 Japan, 188

 Kalach, 123, 125, 128
 Karelian Isthmus–South Karelian operation (June–August 1944), 168
 Karpovo, 112
 Katowice, 185
 Katukov, Lieutenant General M. E., 154, 181
 Kazatin, 154
 Keben, 182
 Kerch, 115
 Khar'kov, 115–16, 122, 134, 138, 141
 Khar'kov operation (May 1942), 115–16
 Khar'kov operation (February–March 1943), 122–3, 126
 Kholm, 172
 Khrushchev, N. S., 203, 213
 Kielec, 182
 Kiev, 134, 146, 153
 Kiev operation (November 1943), 146–50, 153
 Kireev, Colonel N., 220–1
 Kir'ian, Major General M. M., 224, 227–8
 Kirovograd operation (January 1944), 153
 Kirponis, Colonel-General M. P., 98
 Kishinev, 173
 Klin, 113
 Koltov, 170
 Komarov, 154, 157
 Konev, General I. S., 143, 172, 181–2
 Konotop, 143
 Korosten, 159
 Korsun–Shevchenkovskii operation (January–February 1944), 153, 161, 164–7
 Kotel'nikovskiy operation (December 1943), 122–3, 126
 Korzun, Lieutenant Colonel L., 208
 Kovel', 172
 Kozel'sk, 116–17
 Kravchenko, Lieutenant General A. G., 113, 163, 165
 Kramatorsk, 126
 Krasnoarmeiskaia, 126
 Kremenchug, 146
 Kudino, 112
 Kuestrin, 185
 Kurnosov, Lieutenant Colonel N. A., 190
 Kurile Islands, 188
 Kurochkin, General P., 208, 213
 Kursk, 120–2, 134
 Kursk operation (July 1943), 134
 Kuznetsov, Colonel-General F. I., 98
 Kuznetsov, Kombrig F., 89

 Leliushenko, Lieutenant General D.D., 182
 Liutezh, 146
 Liziukov, Major General A. I., 116
 Lodz, 182
 Loev, 143
 Losik, Marshal O. A., 218
 Lublin, 172
 Lublin–Brest operation (July–August 1944), 168, 174–5
 L'vov, 170–2
 L'vov–Sandomierz operation (July–August 1944), 168–70

INDEX

- Lysianka, 165
- Magnushev, 172–81
- Malinovsky, Marshal R. Ia., 199
- Malinovsky Tank Academy, 218
- Manchuria, 188, 192, 206
- Manchurian operation (August 1945), 152, 188–92
- march formation [*pokhodnyi poriadok*], 1, 35, 124, 130
- march security [*pokhodnoe okhranenie*], 1
- Medyn, 113–14
- Melitopol', 143
- Memel', 180
- Mezeretz, 185
- Middle Don operation (December 1942), 123, 125
- Military Districts, Soviet
- Baltic, 98
- Special Kiev, 98
- Minsk, 168, 170
- Mius River, 122
- Mlinov, 104
- mobile obstacle detachment [*podvishnyi otriad zagrazhdenii – POZ*], 7–9, 32
- mobile group [*podvizhnaia grupa*], 76, 85–7, 90, 91, 113, 115, 119, 121–2, 126, 128, 131, 152, 159, 180, 188, 192–3, 195, 197–9, 206, 214, 217, 222
- Mobile Group Popov, 123, 126–7
- Mogilev, 168
- Mogilevka, 157
- Molodechno, 170
- Morozovsk, 125
- Moscow, 96, 108, 112
- Moscow operation (December 1941), 96–7, 108, 112, 115
- movement support detachment [*otriad obespecheniia dvizhenia – OOD*], 2, 4, 25, 129, 135
- Mutanchiang, 190
- Narev River, 152, 170, 180
- Nedeloye, 112
- Neiman River, 170
- Nikonovo, 112
- Nikopol'–Krivoi Rog operation (January–February 1944), 153
- North Caucasus, 117
- Northern Donets River, 122, 126
- Northern Dvina River, 170
- Novaia Slobodka, 112
- Novo-Petrovska, 157
- Novyi Zavod, 159
- Obodnoe, 157
- Oder River, 152, 180, 182, 185
- Odessa operation (March–April 1944), 153
- operational maneuver group (OMG), 214, 231, 233–9
- Operation “Uran” (see Stalingrad operation, November 1942)
- Oppeln', 185
- Order No. 325 (People's Commissariat of Defense), 119
- Orel' operation (July–August 1943), 134
- Orsha, 168, 170
- Oskol River, 122
- Ostrogzhsk–Rossosh' operation (January 1943), 123, 125
- Ostrov, 123
- outpost detachment [*storozhevoi otriad*], 2, 4
- Pavoloch, 148
- Petrov, Lieutenant Colonel V., 159
- Podol'sk Infantry School, 113
- Poland, 90, 153, 172, 180
- Poltava, 141
- Poluboiarov, Major General P. P., 159
- Popel'naia, 148
- Poznikovo, 112
- Praga, 173
- Prague operation (May 1945), 185
- pre-combat formation, 16, 20, 23, 25, 28, 55, 204, 221
- Pronja River, 121
- Proskurov–Chernovtsy operation (March–April 1944), 153, 165
- protection against weapons of massive destruction (ZOMP), 2, 17
- Pulavy, 181
- Radekhov, 98
- Radzievsky, General A. I., 217–18
- Radzumin, 173
- rear party [*tylovyi pokhodnyi zastav – TPZ*], 2, 3, 41
- reconnaissance detachment [*razvedivatel'nyi otriad – RO*], 2, 3, 83–4, 92
- reconnaissance group [*razvedivatel'aia grupa – RG*], 2–3, 135, 202, 212
- reconnaissance patrol [*razvedivatel'nyi dozor – RD*], 2–3, 17, 25–7, 35, 37, 39–41, 44–7, 54–6, 67, 69, 159, 212

THE SOVIET CONDUCT OF TACTICAL MANEUVER

- Red Army Tactical Manual (1942), 119
- Regiments, Soviet
- 17th Tank, 138
 - 41st Automobile, 181
 - 50th Motorized, 141
 - 55th Tank, 28
 - 80th Tank, 104
 - 85th Tank, 104
 - 89th Tank, 181
 - 240th Rifle, 172
 - 507th Tank Destroyer, 181
 - 1006th Rifle, 181
- Regulation for the Penetration of a Positional Defense, 1944, 179–80
- Reznichenko, Major General V. G., 207, 211, 216, 221–4
- Rokossovsky, Major General K. K., 104, 172
- Romny, 141
- Rostov, 121–2
- Rostov operation (January–February 1943), 123, 125
- Rotmistrov, Lieutenant General P. A., 163, 215
- Rovno–Lutsk operation (January–February 1944), 153
- Rudnia-Pochta, 161
- Rumania, 152, 173
- Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), 74
- Rybalko, Lieutenant General P. S., 141, 147–8, 185
- Sakhalin Island, 188
- Savelev, Major General M. I., 165
- Savkin, Colonel V. E., 215–17
- Second World War, 76
- separate reconnaissance patrol [*otdel'nyi razvedivatel'nyi dozor* – ORD], 2, 3
- Shipka Pass, 76
- Sidorenko, Colonel A. A., 215
- Slonim, 170
- Smolensk operation (July–August 1941), 108
- Sokolovsky, Marshal V. D., 203
- Southern Bug River, 154–5, 157
- Soviet High Command [*Stavka*], 95, 115, 117, 119, 122, 131, 143, 163, 180, 185, 199
- Sovkhoz [State Farm] “October Victory”, 125
- Spain, 90
- Spanish Civil War, 76, 88–9
- Stalingrad, 116–17, 119–21
- Stalingrad operation (November 1942), 96–7, 120–1, 123, 125–6, 133
- Starosheika, 161
- Stavka* (see Soviet High Command)
- Strategic Rocket Forces, 203
- Sutiski, 157
- Sverdlov, F. D., v, 214, 216, 220, 223, 226, 238
- tactical air assault landing group (tactical air assault), 7–9, 20, 31–3, 35, 40, 43–4, 48, 50, 92, 131, 207–11, 219–23, 234–5
- Tatsinskaia, 125–6
- Teterev, 151
- Tsimla River, 117
- Tukhachevsky, Marshal M. N., 85, 87
- Ukraine, 108, 146, 152
- Uman–Botoshany operation (March–April 1944), 153
- Valdai Hills, 121
- Vatutin, General N. F., 135, 141, 146–7, 154, 165
- Veliki Bukrin, 141–2, 146
- Vepsk River, 172
- Verkhnyi Mamon, 125
- Vilnius, 170
- Vinnitsa, 154, 157, 159
- Vistula–Oder operation (January–February 1945), 180, 183–7
- Vistula River, 152, 172, 180
- Vitebsk, 168
- Vladimir-Volynsk, 170
- Volodarsk-Volynsky, 159
- Volomin, 173
- Vorob'ev, Colonel I., 205–7, 224–5
- Voronezh, 116–17, 122
- Voronezh–Kastornoe operation (January–February 1943), 123
- Vysokaia Pech', 159, 161
- Vysokinichi, 112
- Vysokopol'e, 138
- Wangchin, 190
- Warsaw, 173
- Warta River, 182
- Western Bug River, 172
- Zakharov, Marshal M. V., 213
- Zaporozh'e, 143
- Zelinsky, Colonel V., 113
- Zhilin, Major General A., 207
- Zhitomir, 154, 159, 161
- Zhitomir–Berdichev operation

INDEX

(December 1943–January 1944),	199
151–8, 162, 165	Zhukovtsy, 157
Zhmerinka, 154, 157, 159	Zvenigorodka, 163, 165
Zhukov, Marshal G. K., 165, 181, 185,	Zybin, Lieutenant Colonel N., 104

